

Screen



The sounds of tap and the sounds of film

The tableau vivant in *Caravaggio*

The legacy of civil rights in 1970s prime time

The growth of 16mm in British television

Subscription & order information

Screen (ISSN 0036-9543) is published quarterly in March June September December by Oxford University Press, Oxford UK Annual subscription price for institutions of UK and Europe £94 USA and Rest of the World US\$170 Personal subscriptions £44 for UK and Europe and US\$74 USA and Rest of the World, and for Students and Unemployed UK and Europe £27 USA and Rest of the World US\$48 The current plus two back volumes are available from Oxford University Press Previous volumes can be obtained from the Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main Street, Germantown, NY 12526 USA Tel +1(518)537 4700 Fax +1(518)537 5899 Screen is distributed by Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel New Jersey NJ 07001 USA Periodical postage paid at Newark New Jersey USA and additional entry points

US POSTMASTER send address changes to Screen, c/o Mercury International 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey NJ 07001 USA

Payment is required with all orders and subscriptions are accepted and entered by the volume(s) Payment may be made by the following methods Cheque (made payable to Oxford University Press) National Girobank (Account 500 1056) Credit Card (Mastercard Visa American Express), UNESCO Coupons Bankers Barclays Bank plc PO Box 333 Oxford Code 20-65-18 Account 00715654 Individual rates apply only when copies are sent to a private address and are paid for by personal cheque or credit card

Please send orders and requests for sample copies to Journals Subscriptions Department, Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street Oxford OX2 6DP Tel +44(0)1865 267907 Fax +44(0)1865 267485 Email jnl.orders@oup.co.uk

© 2003 The John Logie Baird Centre No article may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system without the permission in writing of the editors and the publisher **Screen** incorporates **Screen Education**

ISSN 0036-9543

Typeset by MFK Mendip Ltd
Printed by Bell and Bain Ltd

editors

John Caughie
Simon Frith
Annette Kuhn
Karen Lury
Jackie Stacey
Sarah Street

reports and debates editor

Simon Frith

reviews editors

John Caughie
Karen Lury

website editor

Sarah Street

editorial assistant

Caroline Beven

editorial advisory board

William Boddy (USA)
Giuliana Bruno (Italy/USA)
Charlotte Brunsdon (UK)
Alison Butler (UK)
Erica Carter (UK)
Barbara Creed (Australia)
Sean Cubitt (New Zealand)
Alan Durant (UK)
Dimitris Eleftheriotis (UK)
John Fletcher (UK)
Christine Geraghty (UK)
Claudia Gorbman (USA)
Catherine Grant (UK)
Norman King (UK)
Myra Macdonald (UK)
Laura Marks (USA)
Alastair Phillips (UK)
Murray Smith (UK)
Will Straw (Canada)
Julian Stringer (UK)
Ravi Vasudevan (India)
Ginette Vincendeau (UK)

editorial address

The Editors, Screen
Gilmorehill Centre
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ
screen@arts.gla.ac.uk

internet sites:

<http://www.Screen.arts.gla.ac.uk>
<http://www.oup.co.uk/Screen>

R 21/1/04

screen

44:4 Winter 2003

issue editor

Simon Frith

JODI BROOKS: Ghosting the machine: the sounds of tap and the sounds of film 355

JAMES TWEEDIE: The suspended spectacle of history: the tableau vivant in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* 379

ANIKO BODROGHKOZY: Good times in race relations? CBS's *Good Times* and the legacy of civil rights in 1970s prime-time television 404

JAMIE SEXTON: 'Televerite' hits Britain: documentary, drama and the growth of 16mm filmmaking in British television 429

report

KRISS RAVETTO-BIAGIOLI: Laughing into an abyss: cinema and Balkanization 445

reviews

CHRIS BERRY: Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: the Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*; Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* 465

HOWARD FINN: Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema* 471

IRIS KLEINECKE: Robert Giddings and Keith Selby, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio*; Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Serial* 476

cover illustration

Ruth Myers and Ann Miller battle it out. Picture from the Rusty E. Frank Collection, reproduced with the kind permission of Rusty Frank.

We are delighted to announce the winner of the *Screen* Award 2003 for the best essay to be submitted to the journal during 2002, selected by a judging panel of editors and advisory board members. Our warmest congratulations go to Jodi Brooks, from the University of New South Wales, for her excellent article which is published in this issue.

Screen
is planning a
special issue on
Michael Powell

2005 is the centenary of Michael Powell's birth.
Screen invites articles on themes inspired and
influenced by his work.

The deadline for submissions is 31 March 2004

Please submit two hard copies, marked
'Michael Powell special issue' to

Caroline Beven
Screen

Gilmorehill Centre, University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ

t 0141 330 5035 • f 0141 330 3515

screen@arts.gla.ac.uk

www.screen.arts.gla.ac.uk

Ghosting the machine: the sounds of tap and the sounds of film

JODI BROOKS

WINNER OF THE *SCREEN* AWARD 2003

In 1946 Ann Miller, a tap dancer known for her machine-gun tapping, was set against speed typist Ruth Myers in a publicity stunt to determine who had the fastest tap. In a photograph of the contest the Hollywood dancer–film star and the secretary are set side by side, with Miller (privileged in the frame) positioned on the right and Myers on the left. The dancer is posed mid-step, dressed in a spunky girl-next-door chequered midriff top and matching shorts, while the bespectacled typist – presumably, though less visibly, mid-strike – is seated before her typewriter in a considerably more demure outfit. Each is wired for sound with microphones, aimed at feet and fingers respectively, capturing beats that the ear would almost certainly miss. Miller came in first at this event, clocking in at a remarkable 627 taps per minute (or in film terms, a tap for every 2.3 frames), beating Myers's no less astounding 584 types per minute as well as some of her own earlier records.¹

The photograph of this event presents us with a curious image in that it both recalls and resists familiar images of the gendering of labour and leisure. If the image is read from right to left, Myers is Miller's accompanist; rather than being seated at a typewriter, she should be seated before that other feminized keyboard, the piano, which was in many ways the typewriter's parlour-predecessor for women. If the image is read from left to right, however, Myers would be taking dictation from her (presumably male) boss. But the photograph of Miller and Myers confuses not only these familiar iconographies – because the image does not tell us *what* these two women were tapping

¹ This photograph appears in Rusty E. Frank, *Tap! The Greatest Tap Dance Stars and their Stories, 1900–1955* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1994), p. 246. Miller's speed taps were 'monitored' in a number of such publicity stunts, though there are some discrepancies between accounts of Miller's records. According to Frank, Miller beat her earlier record in the 1946 stunt, but in Jim Connor's book *Ann Miller Tops in Taps: an Authorized Pictorial History* (New York, NY: Franklin Watts, 1961), pp. 58–63, reference is made to an earlier record that Miller had set during rehearsals for the film *True to the Army* (Albert S. Rogell, 1942) in which she clocked up 840 taps to the minute. Connor's book also includes an image of Miller with a pedometer attached to her ankle to clock her *mileage* during rehearsals for the 1944 film *Hey, Rookie!* (Charles Barton).

2 Friedrich Kittler discusses the impact of the typewriter and its predominantly 'female operator' on the rise of the female novelist in his book *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 200–28.

3 Raca [Kracauer], 'Die Revue im Schumann-Theater', *FX Stadt-Rlatt*, 19 May 1925, cited and translated in Miriam Hansen, *America, Paris, the Alps*, Kracauer (and Benjamin) on cinema and modernity', in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 371.

4 Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 12.

5 Siegfried Kracauer, 'The mass ornament', in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995).

out, it also renders problematic the distinction between reproduction and production (a distinction which, of course, the typewriter itself threw into question). We do not know, for instance, whether Miller was dancing to sounds other than those generated by herself or her seated companion, or whether Myers was reproducing/transcribing a written text or, in fact, creating one.² Perhaps what was taking place was something more akin to translation – the typist translating the dancer's taps into types, or the dancer translating the typist's taps into steps. In short, the question of whether the two women were having a jam session – each doing her thing to or against the clock – or, like telegraph operators, taking and transcribing a form of dictation in a Taylorist–Fordist aesthetic regime, is left suspended. What remains is an image of an event that would seem to exemplify what Siegfried Kracauer, writing about the dancing troupe the Tiller Girls, has called a 'flirt by the stopwatch'.³

The Miller and Myers publicity stunt was by no means the first time that tap dancing and typing had been brought together in the same frame. In the 1937 film *Ready, Willing and Able* (Ray Enright), Ruby Keeler and Lee Dixon tap danced across a giant typewriter, while Salman Rushdie cites a similar typewriter dance in his book on *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939). Discussing the relationship between *The Wizard of Oz* and Hindi cinema, Rushdie includes a still from *Bombay Talkie* (James Ivory, 1970) of hipster-clad girls dancing on the keys of yet another giant typewriter keyboard.⁴ But the connections between tap dancing and typing are not limited to those found in dance numbers set on giant keyboards. While one is a form of dance and the other a mode of writing and reproduction, tap dancing and typing have a number of features in common, both in their respective histories and in their function as aural signifiers of twentieth-century modernity. Each was developed in the nineteenth century in a period in which communication technologies were undergoing rapid change, and each went on to take centre stage in the early decades of the twentieth century, revolutionizing office work and writing on the one hand, and vernacular dance on the other. Each entails percussive movements of the body against a surface, and each, as the Miller and Myers publicity stunt makes clear, has been associated with the aestheticization of modern labour.

This image stages one of the central concerns of my essay – the relationship between tap dancing and a Taylorist–Fordist modernity. Tap dancing, and more specifically the tap of the chorus line, was emblematic of 'Amerika' for theorists such as Kracauer: it represented in exemplary form the aestheticization of mechanization and mass production and was thus central to his concept of the 'mass ornament'.⁵ In this respect the tap of the chorus line was linked to many of Kracauer's key arguments about film in his Weimar writings. Like the chorus line's 'flirt by the stopwatch', the Miller and Myers stunt seems visually and aurally to beat out a Taylorist–Fordist structuring of time.

But this image also poses a somewhat different, though related, question. Through its interlinking of tapping and typing and the audio monitoring of the two women's taps, this image/event also questions the degree to which tap dancing can be understood as a form of writing in sound, and thus as a site for aural inscriptions of structurings of time. These aural inscriptions certainly include the 'flirt by the stopwatch' (of which we can find many instances in the Hollywood musical), but they also include instances that trace somewhat different relations to a Taylorist-Fordist aesthetic regime and which, through their cross-rhythms, make time palpable as a site of contestation. While the former has received critical attention in studies of the film musical, considerably less attention has been paid to the temporal inscriptions found in tap dance numbers characterized by forms of rhythmic play.

Tap dancing had a central place in the studio-era Hollywood musical, and as Frank writes, 'from the 1920s–1950s, there were very few musical films made that did *not* have tap dancing in some form'.⁶ Hollywood did not limit itself to the tap of the chorus line but drew on many forms of tap and tap-related dance, from legomania and eccentric dance through to rhythm tap. Tap dancing not only appeared in the film musical, it also featured in numerous short films and cartoons. In addition, tap numbers were also often performed live in cinemas at this time, and tap dancers Harold and Fayard Nicholas have talked of the importance that watching the tap performances at the Standard Theatre in Philadelphia had for their own work.⁷ But by the 1950s tap – often referred to as America's first indigenous dance style – was progressively displaced (from both the Broadway stage and the Hollywood screen) by the rising popularity and dominance of Agnes de Mille's screen choreography. De Mille, to whom Miller refers as 'that lady from the ballet', led the turn to more classically-based dance in the Hollywood musical and, with this, the shift away from tap.⁸

Tap, of course, did not originate with the Hollywood musical, though it certainly impacted on the development of the genre and was in turn influenced by it. Tap dancing's origins and influences, so often debated, are many and varied, depending on whether one is tracing steps or rhythms. Related to dance forms as diverse as Lancashire clog dancing, the Irish jig, African ring dances and the African-American shuffle, and evident in minstrelsy, burlesque, vaudeville, musical theatre and on street corners, tap dancing also literally traveled back and forth across both the US and the Atlantic. But tap's history also meets up with the history of film, and in many ways it developed *alongside* film, with which it was contemporary. Tap was particularly prominent in the musicals of the 1930s, a period that could be considered as sound film's adolescence. Tap's place on screen at this time must certainly be understood in relation to the popularity of the dance form during the Depression and New Deal eras. I would suggest, however, that its popularity on screen could also be tied to tap's sounds, for as a dance form tap would seem to be designed for demonstrating the wonders of

6 Frank, *Tap!*, p. 299

7 See Constance Valis Hill, *Brotherhood in Rhythm* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). As Hill writes: 'Although the policy of mixing film with live stage shows at the Standard was intermittent until 1930, beginning in 1931 the Standard announced a "New Policy of Stage and Screen Shows". The theatre soon boasted an increase in the average attendance by 48 percent in one week' (p. 47).

8 Of course responsibility for the fading popularity of hoofing, along with other tap-related forms of dance, cannot be solely placed at de Mille's feet. See Jacquie Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues: the Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

synchronized sound (even though film sound technology at the time often fell short of doing justice to the sounds and beats of a dance). Indeed, some of the changes in the dance form could be related to the forms of audibility that film, in principle if not always in practice, offered to tap. The introduction and popularity of the more audible metal taps, for instance, accompanied the development of sound film (just as sand dancing seemed to develop to meet the sonic requirements of vaudeville): metal taps were developed two years before the release of *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927) and were in wide use by the early 1930s. While the reasons for the shift from wooden to metal taps are no doubt many, the different kind of audibility offered by the latter – producing a sound that was sharper though less resonant – would seem not only to service the needs of film sound but also to align tap's sounds with particular ideas of the machinic and the camera-projector apparatus.

Tap and cinema, I would suggest, have had an odd and sometimes brutal kinship, which is not simply a result of the place of tap *in film*. It also arises from the place of film *in tap*, or more specifically the ways that ideas of the camera-projector apparatus and the moving image in general seem to underlie and infuse some forms of tap dancing. In tap, the click of the taps can appear to animate the body's movements, recalling and playing with ideas of the machinic. This effect can be even more pronounced in screen tap, where the sounds of the taps can serve to suggest or mimic the suppressed sounds of the camera-projector apparatus. Screen tap, in short, would appear to be a privileged site for playing with the temporality of the filmic image and its 'compulsory' movement. As a dance form that seems to be marked by ideas of the moving image, tap dancing could be seen as having a similar relationship to film as voguing has to the photograph. With its rapid progression through a series of highly constructed poses, voguing plays with the visual and temporal construction of the pose in the fashion photograph, mimicking both the motor drive and the catwalk's bank of cameras. Tap dancing, I would suggest, can engage in a similar kind of play with ideas of film time, its clicks punctuating the movements and postures of the body like the movement of film through both the camera and the gate of the projector.

This essay explores some of the complex relations to the machinic and Taylorist-Fordist structurings of time that can be found in various forms of screen tap and their visual and aural rhythms. First I look at the connections that have been drawn between the chorus line and Taylorist-Fordist modes of production (in particular, with the conveyor belt). I then argue that tap operates as a form of sound writing. Positioning tap dancing in relation to a number of nineteenth-century communication technologies that are based in the writing and reading of sound (such as the electric telegraph), this section focuses on tap's sounds and their place in the Hollywood musical, particularly in terms of the ways this sonic terrain is marked by classical Hollywood's

racializing practices. Finally the discussion turns to two recent films that bring many of these issues together – *Bamboozled* (Spike Lee, 2000), about the history and heritage of blackface minstrelsy, and Michael Jackson's music video *Black or White* (1991).

African-American tap dance styles and performers played an important, if little acknowledged, role in the development of the studio-era Hollywood musical. While African-American tap dancers were generally marginalized into novelty or 'specialty' numbers or were simply absent from the screen, their dance styles played a key role in the genre. *Bamboozled* and *Black or White* critically address the place of African-American vernacular dance (and tap in particular) in Hollywood cinema. Each film raises the Hollywood musical's barely repressed ghosts – the bodies, sounds, and steps of African-American vernacular dance. Each addresses the ways in which the musical marginalized and silenced African-American dancers while simultaneously using their steps. *Bamboozled* aligns minstrelsy with a particular rhythmic structure and *Black or White* draws to the surface the dance rhythms that were often sidelined or rendered mute in the musical through the erasure of African-American dancers, while both films give their sounds a heightened audibility. What is particularly interesting about *Bamboozled*'s and *Black or White*'s respective critiques of the place of tap in film is that these critiques are largely undertaken through dance numbers that refigure the place of the moving image *in tap*. Each film 'peaks' with a dance that not only marks the crisis point in the narrative, but also seems to be at war with the structuring of time that the two films associate with Hollywood cinema as a media industry and a representational system.

Coquetry to the clock

In a frequently cited passage from his essay 'Girls and crisis', Kracauer interlinks tap dancing and Taylorist-Fordist modes of production. Writing of the dancing troupe the Alfred-Jackson Girls, Kracauer describes the beat that both drives and haunts labour and leisure:

Anyone who has ever traveled on a pleasure boat has certainly, with his back turned towards some lake, leaned over the rampart inside the ship and looked down at the glistening engines. The poses that the girls strike recall the regular play of the engines' pistons. They are not militarily exact, rather they respond to the ideal of the machine. . . . What is embodied by them as by a simile that has become flesh? The *functioning* of a glistening economy. In the postwar era in which prosperity seemed unlimited and still no one had anything but the slightest presentiment of unemployment – at that time girls were artificially produced in the USA and then serially exported to Europe. They were not only American products, they demonstrated the greatness of American production. I clearly

- 9 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Girls and crisis', *Travis, Courtney Hedger, Qui Parle*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1992), pp. 51–2

- 10 See Friedrich Kittler's discussion of Paula Schlier's novel *Konzept einer legendenlosen Zeit/Under the Dictates of Time* 'Schlier's novel that extraordinarily precise subtitle for a secretary, hears in "the regular clanging of letters the melody accompanying all the madness of the world" from world war field hospitals and lectures in Munich to the editorial office of the *Völkische Beobachter* and the Beer Hall Putsch' Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 221

- 11 See Hansen, 'America, Paris, the Alps'

- 12 Kracauer 'The mass ornament', p. 79

- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 77

recollect the appearance of such troops in the season of their fame. When they built a line that moved up and down, they radiantly illustrated the advantages of the conveyor belt; when they tap-danced at a fast tempo it sounded like, 'business, business, business'.⁹

While the moving chorus line visually 'illustrated the advantages of the conveyor belt', the 'business, business, business' of the fast tempo tap dancing visually *and aurally* referenced the conveyor belt and mass production along with, I would add, the interwar office's equivalent of the chorus line: rows of young female office workers, drumming out endless documents on identical typewriters.

For Kracauer, the rhythm that the tapping chorus line beats out is the exemplary sound of American modernity, and racing fingers and racing feet tapped out a similar beat, from office to matinee movie to supper club.¹⁰ Giving voice to mechanical industrialization in an aestheticized form, the rhythm of Kracauer's chorus line is a rhythm that is driven by, and subservient to, the clock. In this respect, tapping and typing exemplify a form of temporal experience seen as central to twentieth-century modernity – the peculiar erotics of the clock in Taylorist–Fordist culture – and as such can be considered one of its key time signatures (and a distinctly *aural* time signature).

'Girls and crisis' was published in 1931 and, like his 1927 essay 'The mass ornament', turned to the chorus line as a key instance of the aestheticization of mechanization. Kracauer was particularly interested in the ways that the machinic – and Taylorist–Fordist principles of standardization more generally – infused leisure as well as labour. It was in these terms that he frequently turned to both the tap dancing chorus line and its corollary, the choreographed displays of abstract geometric patterns or 'mass ornaments' that were particularly popular in the 1930s.¹¹ Produced through the arrangement of hundreds of bodies in stadiums and other venues across Europe and the USA, and traveling the globe through newsreels and Hollywood musicals, these mass ornaments were, of course, to take ominous form in Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will* (1934).

In the 1927 essay Kracauer described the mass ornament as 'the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires'.¹² The mass ornaments produced by the chorus line and the arrangement of bodies in the stadium

have no meaning beyond themselves. ... Rather, the girl-units drill in order to produce an immense number of parallel lines, the goal being to train the broadest mass of people in order to create a pattern of undreamed-of dimensions. The end result is the ornament, whose closure is brought about by emptying all the substantial constructs of their contents.¹³

For Kracauer, the liberatory potential of the mass ornament certainly

lies in the way in which it makes capitalist modes of production visible. More importantly, as Gertrud Koch has argued, Kracauer was interested in the ways that the mass encountered itself in the mass ornament. As Koch puts it: 'For the real quality of the mass ornament is that it functions as a sign that does not falsely separate the body as a whole from organic life and instead makes the "segments" gel to form part of a "composition", emphasizing its abstract and artificial character'.¹⁴ Between the writing of 'The mass ornament' and 'Girls and crisis' however, as a number of theorists have pointed out, Kracauer's relation to the chorus line, which he saw as emblematic of the mass ornament, shifted significantly. By 1931, in the midst of the depression, Kracauer's hopes for the liberatory potential of the mass ornament had seemingly faded from view.

'The mass ornament' has rightfully received extensive critical attention in recent Anglo-US work on Kracauer's Weimar writings and the theory of film developed therein. His essay, as Miriam Hansen has argued, can be considered 'the *locus classicus* of Kracauer's analysis of Fordist mass culture',¹⁵ and it plays a crucial role in the development of his key concept of the 'mass'. Kracauer's analyses of the tap-dancing chorus line have frequently been drawn on in film debates for addressing the aestheticization of Taylorist-Fordist modes of production in the Hollywood musical, in particular in studies of Busby Berkeley's work in the 1930s Warner Bros. musicals.¹⁶ Berkeley's spectacular dance sequences in films such as *Footlight Parade* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933) and the *Gold Diggers* series (1933–38) would seem to be made for Kracauer's concept of the mass ornament. The visual rhythms of Berkeley's dance numbers – rhythms produced not simply through the dancing (of which, one could argue, there is often little in these sequences) but also and primarily through camera movement, editing, and the production of a mobile *mise en scene* through the shifting formations of the dancers – certainly present an aestheticization of capitalist production modes. Composed of spectacular arrangements of myriad limbs, faces and costumes, the multiplied and multiplying body-segments of these choreographed 'ornaments' are coordinated into an ever-unfolding composition.

While Kracauer's concept of the mass ornament has also played an important role in recent work on the film musical, my interest in these essays is limited to the time signature that Kracauer identifies in the chorus line and the way it is constituted through, and as, aural and visual rhythms. In 'Girls and crisis', the tap of the chorus line beats out 'business, business, business', with tap's sounds mimicking and correlating with the time of the clock and the temporal structuring of Taylorist-Fordist production practices; but clearly 'business, business, business' is not the only thing that tap was beating out in the 1920s and 1930s, in cinema or elsewhere, as Kracauer himself was well aware. The Tiller Girls, it should be pointed out, were showgirls, predecessors of the Radio City Rockettes, and kicking was more central

¹⁴ Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: an Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 35–6.

¹⁵ Hansen, 'America, Paris, the Alps', p. 374.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Pamela Robertson's chapter on *Gold Diggers of 1933* in her book *Feminist Camp: From Mae West to Madonna* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), and Patricia Mellencamp, 'The sexual economies of *Gold Diggers of 1933*', in Peter Lehman (ed.), *Close Viewings: an Anthology of New Film Criticism* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1990).

17 See Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: the Story of American Vernacular Dance* (1968) (New York, NY and London: Schirmer Books/London: Marmillan 1979) pp. 131–147.

18 Compare Kracauer's *Tiller Girls* with the following account of a young Josephine Baker in the chorus line of *Shuffle Along*, one of the most important 'Negro musicals' of the 1920s: 'Josephine Baker, who exploded rather than emerged, was sixteen years old when she was hired as end-girl on the chorus line. The second act opened with dancer Charlie Davis, dressed as a policeman, directing traffic and singing "Shuffle Along". The chorus line came on to back him up, singing and doing a routine while he danced, with Josephine at the end of the line. "That was when she started doing crazy things", says [Eubie] Blake, "no routine, just mugging, crossing her eyes, tripping, getting out of step and catching up, doing all the steps the rest were doing, but funnier". The audience always cheered. She was paid \$125 a week on the road, an astronomical sum in those days and for that show, and she stayed in the chorus line as long as she was with *Shuffle Along*." Stearns *Jazz Dance*, pp. 133–4.

19 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Travel and dance', *The Mass Ornament*. Kracauer also wrote a number of other essays on jazz and jazz-based dance, few of which have been translated into English. See, in particular, his essay, 'Exzentrikaner in den Ufa-Lichtspielen', *FZ*, 16 October 1928.

20 Kracauer, 'Travel and dance', pp. 66–7. For Kracauer the change in tempo that jazz entailed – from that of daily life to that of rhythm itself – may be offering an inauthentic experience of the eternal, but in doing so it is at least an indicator of an increasingly 'unavailable real existence' (p. 72).

21 As was the case in many parts of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, jazz had taken Weimar Germany

than tap to their routines.¹⁷ Based on military drill, their acts had little in common with the privileging of rhythmic play that characterized the chorus lines of the 'Negro musicals' that were taking Broadway by storm in the 1920s and that played an important role in the development of the chorus line, musical comedy and the Hollywood musical.¹⁸ What is happening in the move away from the unsyncopated aural beat of 'business, business, business' and its matching visual beat of synchronized leg formations to forms of tap that are based in (and are a foundation of) jazz?

Kracauer did not limit his discussion of the dance of the jazz age to that of the chorus line. While the chorus line, like the movements of the mass ornaments in the stadium, demonstrated a precise punctuality, Kracauer also turned to forms of dance that engaged in a somewhat different relation to Fordism, particularly in his writings on jazz. In his essay 'Travel and dance',¹⁹ for instance, Kracauer turned directly to the jazz era's 'dance craze' and what he saw as its addiction to rhythm. 'Travel and dance' was written a few years earlier than 'The mass ornament' and 'Girls and crisis', and while considerably more critical of such forms of entertainment, anticipates some of the later essays' key arguments. Yet while in 'Travel and dance' questions of rhythm and dance are much more central than in his writings on the chorus line, Kracauer is less interested in (and less attentive to) the rhythms of jazz and more concerned with its function as a diversion from the regime of the clock:

Just as travel has been reduced to a pure experience of space, *dance* has been transformed into a mere marking of time. . . . The secret aim of jazz tunes, no matter how negroid their origins may be, is a tempo that is concerned with nothing but itself. . . . For jazz music, no matter how vital it may be considered to be, leaves whatever is merely alive to its own devices. As a result, the movements it engenders (which obviously tend to get worn down to a meaningless shuffle) are hardly more than rhythmic offerings, temporal experiences whose ultimate joy is syncopation.²⁰

While one of the attractions of this essay is that Kracauer approaches jazz in terms of the relations between rhythmic practices and structurings of time, his understanding of jazz and jazz-based dance here is somewhat limited (and is perhaps best approached as an account of the commodified forms of jazz that were gaining popularity at the time than as jazz theory/criticism).²¹ For Kracauer, in the dance of the jazz age one simply leaves one tempo and beat (that of mechanization) to enter another – which is, in the end, simply the flip side of the first. Jazz's rhythms (and tempos) are seen as operating as a break from, and an alternative to, those of daily life, rather than as an interpretation and response to those rhythms. Thus this essay offers little scope for addressing the ways that jazz's forms of cross-rhythms can critically engage with structurings of time in twentieth-century modernity.

by storm, and the Charleston, and later the Jitterbug, had become popular dance crazes. See Les Black, 'Nazism and the call of the Jitterbug', in Helen Thomas (ed.), *Dance in the City* (London: Macmillan, 1997).

22 As characterized by many of the Nicholas Brothers' numbers, for instance, to which I refer later

23 See Geri Hirshey's wonderful description of James Brown at work: 'James! he was then shooting out of the wings like a pinball off the spring with a "pleeeeeease" that could drop a hairpin at fifty feet. James, skittering sideways on one leg that drove and twisted in quadruple time, while the other kept a backseat in the air. James, leading the guitar player with his shoulder, the horn section with his knees, the drummer with a nod.' Geri Hirshey, *Nowhere to Run: The Story of Soul Music* (London: Pan Books/Macmillan, 1984), p. 268

24 Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues*, pp. 94–5

Through its foregrounding of visual and aural rhythms, screen tap offers a privileged site for the inscription of structurings of time in film. Tap dancing, after all, is a writing in sound, and as such its aural beats can work in a variety of ways with or against the visual rhythms of the image that are generated by the dance itself, or what we could call 'figure movement'. While with chorus lines such as the Tiller Girls and their screen equivalents the visual and aural beats of the dance may 'match' (illustrating the wonders of Fordist production methods), in other forms of tap and screen tap – particularly those marked by complex cross-rhythms and suspended beats²² – these aural beats can work either with or against the visual beats of the image. Of course screen tap is not unique, either in the fields of dance or cinema in its ability to produce polyrhythms across and between the visual and the aural. One need only think, for instance, of James Brown's music and dancing: dividing his body into different rhythmic 'zones', time bifurcates more surely in Brown's work than it does in any of Gilles Deleuze's examples of the crystal image.²³ However, because screen tap produces both visual rhythms (through figure movement) and aural rhythms (through tap's sounds), and because tap's sounds can mark the image with conflicting beats and directions, screen tap is a privileged site for the production of polyrhythms.

Sound writing

Tap dancing is a form of dance in which the body becomes a sound-producing instrument and in which the physical impact of sound is foregrounded. Tap, in short, is percussive. While it may not be the only kind of dance in which the dancer is also a drummer, it is certainly one in which this relationship is central. This connection between tap dancing and drumming is something that has frequently been commented on by both tap dancers and jazz musicians as well as by dance theorists, particularly in relation to the tap dancing of African-American dancers. As Jacqui Malone writes in her book *Steppin' on the Blues*:

Rhythm tappers are jazz percussionists who value improvisation and self-expression. Jazz musicians tell stories with their instruments and rhythm tappers tell stories with their feet. In a 1973 obituary for [tap dancer] Baby Laurence, Whitney Balliett wrote, 'A great drummer dances sitting down. A great tap-dancer drums standing up.'²⁴

And in case we are deaf to the connection between dance and drumming, Bill Robinson acts it out for us in *Stormy Weather* (Andrew L. Stone, 1943), in the famous dance sequence where he literally steals the stage from his romantic rival and tap dances across the band's seemingly endless array of drums.

Through the tactile inscription of sound, tap dancing can be likened to a number of nineteenth-century aural and visual communication

²⁵ See Jay Clayton, 'The voice in the machine', in Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass and Nancy Vickers (eds), *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1997).

²⁶ See Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); for a particularly interesting discussion of forms of mechanized inscription

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1981), p. 15.

devices – of which the telegraph would be central – in which sound and touch, the aural and the haptic, are interlinked.²⁵ Like the electric telegraph, which was introduced in 1837 and was a major nineteenth-century communication, writing and sound technology, tap is a kind of writing in sound, and (like the telegraph) solicits a form of 'sound reading'.²⁶ After all, one does not just watch tap but also, and perhaps primarily, listens to it – which is why there were tap records and tap radio broadcasts (and why tap dancing contests placed judges not only in the audience and wings but below the stage).

But I would also suggest that while tap can be positioned in relation to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century technologies of writing in sound (such as the telegraph and the phonograph), it can also be related to film and to a range of protocinematic devices, particularly through the ways it can connote or allude to the suppressed sounds of the camera–projector apparatus. In his book *Camera Lucida*, Barthes writes that 'the only thing that I tolerate, that I like, is the sounds of the camera ... their abrupt click breaking through the mortiferous layers of the pose'.²⁷ The click of the camera's shutters operates, for Barthes, as the 'noise of Time', marking that which is before the camera with the mortality that he locates at the heart of the Photograph. Tap's sounds can be understood as having a similar relationship to film in that they can suggest the camera–projector apparatus and its animation of time. In tap, and in screen tap in particular, the clicks of the taps – those mechanical, typewriter-like sounds – do not simply punctuate the figure and the image but can appear to *generate* its movements.

This capacity of screen tap to mimic the movement of frames through the projector is something that Busby Berkeley exploits in his remarkable dance number 'Lullaby of Broadway' from *Gold Diggers of 1935* (Busby Berkeley, 1935). 'Lullaby of Broadway' was reportedly Berkeley's favourite dance sequence from one of his own productions. Rather than exemplifying the unfolding kaleidoscopic display of posed bodies that is generally associated with his work, 'Lullaby of Broadway' is a remarkable orchestration of sound. 'Lullaby of Broadway' is a dance number in which the *aural* rhythms of tap (rather than the visual rhythms of an unfolding graphic design) are granted centre stage. The percussive sounds of tap are relentlessly foregrounded as about a hundred black-clad dancers in gendered 'teams' tap their way across the set, punctuating the image with a rush of visual and aural rhythms. Unlike most of Berkeley's dance numbers, it is sound that comes to the fore in 'Lullaby of Broadway', both through the multiplication and amplification of tap sounds and through the relationship between these aural rhythms and the visual rhythms generated by the arrangement and movement of the lines of tapping dancers. Certainly the sheer mass of tap sounds sets 'Lullaby of Broadway' apart from many other Berkeley dance numbers, but of equal interest here is the relationship between the sequence's visual and aural rhythms. The percussive aural beats of the taps seem to animate

both the bodies and the image itself, an effect which is particularly highlighted when the mass of dancers, shot in long-shot, moves into a trenches step (a step in which the dancer leans forward from the waist, with arms swinging across the body as each leg slides back, performing a stationary run.) As arms and legs move in a rapid mechanical motion, like propellers, each movement is punctuated by the click of the taps, and the dancers seem to be both set in motion and arrested through these sounds. As if mimicking the projector's animation of still frames, the dance takes on something akin to a flicker-effect.

In this respect the sounds of the taps in 'Lullaby of Broadway' do not simply mark the image with a relentless forward movement but embrace and impact on a number of film's temporal fields. In her essay 'Screening time', Mary Ann Doane refers to the 'multiple temporalities' that make up cinema.²⁸ These temporalities include that of the apparatus, which is 'linear, irreversible, "mechanical"', those of the diegesis, or 'the way in which time is represented by the image, the varying invocations of present, past, future, historicity', and those of reception, the latter being for Doane 'theoretically distinct' from the previous two.²⁹ While the role of sound is absent from Doane's discussion, it offers a particularly rich field for (in Doane's terms) representing time and for temporalizing the image more generally. Indeed, as Michel Chion and others have argued, sound can temporalize the image in a variety of ways (for Chion, sound can temporally animate the image, give it temporal linearization and 'vectorize' or 'dramatize' a shot).³⁰ In screen tap, the sounds of the taps can engage with and impact on each of the temporalities that Doane identifies. Playing with ideas of the camera-projector apparatus, these sounds can give form to the temporality of the apparatus – no longer simply 'linear and irreversible' but rendered dynamic and multidirectional as suspended beats seem to pull against the movement of the film. Through the relations between its aural and visual rhythms, screen tap can also play with the temporality of the diegesis, withholding time in a movement, for instance, while accelerating it through sound. But tap can also impact on the temporalities of reception in that its beats solicit and address the spectatorial body in specific ways.³¹

If screen tap is a privileged site in which to address the relations between sound and the perception and structuring of time in film it is because tap is crucially *about* sound. It is about clean, crisp sounds, about working with the different timbres available through the impact of different surfaces against each other, and about generating complex beats. In studies of the Hollywood musical, however, little attention has been given to the sounds of tap. In a sense this is not surprising and would seem to be a result of the boundaries between disciplinary fields: tap, after all, is both a dance form *and* a form of music-making. Falling across two areas of study in film debates – the soundtrack and performance – screen tap seems to have been sidelined in each. After

28 Mary Ann Doane, 'Screening time', in Masten et al. (eds), *Language Machines*

29 As Doane writes, while the temporality of reception is theoretically distinct, it is 'nevertheless a temporality which the developing classical cinema attempted to fuse as tightly as possible to that of the apparatus, conferring upon it the same linear predictability and irreversibility' Doane, 'Screening time', p. 138

30 See Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 13–24

31 Sound, as Deleuze writes, 'has a special relation with touch: hitting on things, on bodies' Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 236

all, in both popular and academic histories of the Hollywood musical it is rare that sound has been credited with redirecting the genre (and when it has, it has largely been in terms of the role of popular music): Busby Berkeley is credited with revolutionizing the musical by releasing the camera from the constraints of a diegetically justified viewpoint and producing kaleidoscopic displays of bodies; Fred Astaire is credited with granting the dance its rightful place by refusing the segmentation of a dance and arguing that his dances be filmed with as few edits as possible, and with the whole body in frame. Where, one might ask, are those other pioneers of the musical? Those that argued for the *sound* of the dance? Could we not also argue, for instance, that Berkeley's revolutionizing of the genre also included the primary role he gave to tap's sounds – not just in 'Lullaby of Broadway' but also in many of his earlier dance numbers in films such as *42nd Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933) and *Footlight Parade*? But the role of tap's sounds in the classical Hollywood musical has not only been overlooked in studies of the genre, it was often marginalized in the films themselves, either by being progressively muted beneath the song or by being contained in specialty numbers.

Tap's sounds have often occupied a strange position in the Hollywood musical; certainly the dance numbers that are remembered and canonized as the Hollywood musical's greatest triumphs are often tap numbers in which the sounds of the taps are not only audible but seem to be amplified. One could think here of Donald O'Connor's and Gene Kelly's 'Moses Supposes' dance in *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952), Ann Miller in *Kiss Me Kate* (George Sidney, 1953), Bill Robinson in *Stormy Weather*, or James Cagney's 'Shanghai Lil' tap dance in *Footlight Parade*. However, when these dance numbers are viewed in the films themselves, they are often the 'exceptions' and are generally surrounded by dance numbers (including tap dance numbers) where the sounds of the dance are muted, drowned out by the band or hidden beneath the song.

And yet while the tendency to favour the song over the sounds of the tap was prevalent in many studio-era Hollywood musicals (and there were no doubt economic considerations in terms of the sale of sheet music and records), this practice was by no means exclusive, and the exceptions are particularly important here. In the Hollywood musical, tap's sounds were consistently more audible in the specialty numbers that were generally the terrain of secondary characters (and often uncredited). In many instances the dancers for these numbers were established African-American tap dancers – flash acts such as the Nicholas Brothers and the Berry Brothers, for instance, in films such as *Down Argentine Way* (Irving Cummings, 1940), *Stormy Weather*, *Orchestra Wives* (Archie Mayo, 1942), *The Pirate* (Vincente Minnelli, 1948) and *Panama Hattie* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1942). As has often been noted, many of these novelty or specialty numbers were designed for easy removal from a film, when playing, for example, in southern

states whose audiences were opposed to seeing black performing bodies on screen. These numbers operated almost as independent units in a film, often not integrally tied to the narrative and operating more as performance interludes. While one of the features of the film musical itself, as Jane Feuer and others have argued, is its episodic character consisting of various 'attractions', these 'removable' numbers would seem to be attractions of a slightly different order, precisely because they were also conceived in terms of their possible absence from the film. Of course in some instances these performances outshone the film itself. In her book *Brotherhood in Rhythm* Constance Valis Hill discusses the reception of the Nicholas Brothers' three-and-a-half minute 'Down Argentine Way' dance from the film of the same name, a scene which, as she writes, 'triggered a vociferous response from audiences across the country':

Audiences watching the scene would not stop whistling, clapping, and stomping their feet. Some even shouted up to the operator in the projection booth to stop the film, rewind it, and show the scene again. In the South, where it was the custom to censor segments of a film that contained scenes with black actors, *Down Argentine Way* was shown uncut, and both black and white audiences in their segregated movie houses screamed in excitement over the tap dancing of the Nicholas Brothers. . . . In a small town in Texas, the local newspaper informed its readers of how many minutes into the film the Nicholas Brothers appeared; townsfolk arrived at the theatre minutes before the scene, stood and cheered while watching it, and left soon after it was over. In Brooklyn, the marquee of a movie theatre announced, 'Nicholas Brothers starring in *Down Argentine Way*', even though that was the one and only scene in which they appeared. Even on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, the starring names of Betty Grable and Don Ameche were dropped from the marquee of the Hollywood Theatre, which instead announced, 'Nicholas Brothers in *Down Argentine Way*'.³²

One of the peculiar side-effects of the placement, function and audibility of these dance numbers is that African-American tap dancers, while generally sidelined in a film's storyline, often seem to be the most audible dancers in the films in which they appeared. This effect seems to arise from two factors, each of which can be related to classical Hollywood's racializing practices. On the one hand, because these performers were rarely given speaking parts (or sang the film's marketed songs), the sounds of their dances tended to carry a weight and significance that differed from that of tap dances performed by the more central characters, as these sounds also stood in the place of dialogue or song and foregrounded their muting. On the other hand, this effect would also seem to be a result of the kinds of audibility granted to the African-American dancer *as body*.

³² Valis Hill, *Brotherhood in Rhythm*, pp. 155–6

Of particular interest here is Fred Astaire's and LeRoy Daniels's 'Shine on my Shoes' dance in *The Band Wagon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1953), a dance number in which the sounds of the taps are progressively replaced by musical 'interpretations' of these sounds and then lost under the music as the number progresses. This suppression of the sounds of the taps in favour of the musical score takes place as the number shifts its focus from a black dancing body (Daniels) to a white one (Astaire). Considering that this number is the only time in his career when Astaire danced on screen with an African-American dancer, the relationship between the two dancers in this number – and the way that Astaire 'acquires' Daniels's steps and rhythm – is particularly significant.

The number is set in a penny arcade, a location which serves to juxtapose the mechanical, deathly beats of a number of automated 'entertainments' with the more rhythmic beats of the dance. The scene starts with Tony/Astaire wandering through the penny arcade, sampling the various attractions. In the diorama 'The Gorilla's Bride', an automated maiden halfheartedly jerks its way through poses of supine distress; an 'Electricity is Life' display administers an uneventful electric charge; another automaton – 'Madame Olga's Predictions' – delivers fortunes; and the 'Test Your Love Appeal' machine diagnoses sex appeal for a nickel. It is only when Astaire trips over the bootblack (played by dancer Daniels in an uncredited appearance) that the dance – and it is the first in the film – commences. The dance itself is divided into three sections, during which syncopated rhythms move from Daniels's body to Astaire's and Daniels is progressively moved into the role of audience. In the first section of the number, Daniels and Astaire dance together. Daniels serves here as the rhythm section (while also shining Astaire's shoes), generating and in many ways leading the dance from Astaire's song. Percussive sounds are dominant in this section of the dance, both those generated by Daniels's steps (and their supplementing in the score) and those that he produces on Astaire's feet through his play with the brushes. The music is syncopated, but it is Daniels's steps and their sounds that privilege the backbeat, his steps and moves producing complex visual and aural beats and animating the dance itself. But in the second part of the dance, Daniels becomes an audience to Astaire's solo. The song moves from four-four to two-four time and Astaire dances around the arcade to a repeated 'I've got shine on my shoes'. In this section, the sounds of the dancing body are now barely audible and Astaire's voice, along with the band, dominates the soundtrack. The 'passing' of rhythm from Daniels to Astaire has enabled him to master and upstage the arcade's mechanical amusements: he 'recharges' the 'Electricity is Life' machine and cracks open the what's-in-it mystery box by tap dancing against its metal case. (This early scene thereby also sets in motion the narrative trajectory of the film: just as Astaire goes on to inject rhythm into the stodgy musical theatre piece in which he stars, here he injects rhythm –

33 See James Brown's comments on the demand to perform bodily subservience. Though it is more than a century since he first punished cartilage and bone by dropping down during "Please Please, Please", James Brown says he still cannot get up off his knees: "They made my daddy crawl. Crawl under cars, behind mules. Crawl all kinds of ways. Four years ago they made me go down on my knees—my comeback they called it—to prove I could still do it. That at his age James Brown can still get down!" Hirshey, *Nowhere to Run*, pp. 266–7.

34 In a film tribute to the musical, *That's Dancing* (Jack Haley, Jr. 1985), this marginalization of the African-American dancer is taken one step further in that this dance number is only shown from the second section of the dance – the point where Daniels becomes an audience to Astaire.

35 Carol Clover, 'Dancin' in the rain', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1995), pp. 722, 747; and Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002). See also Linda Mizejewski's essay 'Beautiful white bodies', which touches on some of these concerns, and Michael Rogin's 'New Deal blackface', both in Steven Cohan (ed.), *Hollywood Musicals: the Film Reader* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2001).

36 One of the most significant figures here is Buddy Bradley, who reportedly taught many Hollywood chorines and stars as well as Broadway and vaudeville dancers in New York. Marshall and Jean Stearns devote a chapter of their book *Jazz Dance* to Clarence 'Buddy' Bradley, including the following quotation from Cecil Beaton about Fred Astaire's sister Adele (who was the dominant partner in the dancing duo prior to her retirement): "I had a date down Broadway to see Adele Astaire at a Negro dance school where she is taking lessons. Adele looked her best in a pair of pale blue

acquired from Daniels – into the penny arcade and its attractions.) In the final section of the number, Daniels returns to the dance, though now clearly in an accompanying role. The percussive sounds of the steps – the sounds, in other words, that are associated with or generated by the body itself – once again make their aural appearance, and the number closes with Astaire dancing out of frame and leaving Daniels, in a pose steeped in minstrelsy, on his knees waving him off.³³

'Shine on my Shoes' brings together a number of issues that are of importance here in terms of the place of tap's sounds in the Hollywood musical. Firstly, of course, it is a particularly tidy demonstration of the Hollywood musical's practice of simultaneously deploying and marginalizing African-American vernacular dance and dancers.³⁴ Secondly, it foregrounds the ways that tap's sounds were often dominant in specialty or novelty numbers: here, they are dominant in the novelty section of the dance (as it is in many ways the presence of the dancing shoe-shine 'boy' that constitutes the novelty here), the section where the African-American Daniels is leading the dance. Finally, and related to both of the above, it juxtaposes a mechanical beat, represented through the automatons of the arcade, with a syncopated beat represented by the dance. In other words, in this dance number tap, as a form of sound writing, also serves to make audible a rhythm to which it is opposed, that of the machinic, and what makes the stodgy rhythm of the machinic audible, of course, is the syncopated rhythm that Tony/Astaire has acquired from Daniels.

The impact of African-American dance and music on the studio-era Hollywood musical has frequently been acknowledged in dance theory and history, for example in studies such as Malone's *Steppin' on the Blues* and Valis Hill's *Brotherhood in Rhythm*. This history, however, has received remarkably little attention in film debates (the notable exception here would be Carol Clover's essay 'Dancin' in the rain', to which I will turn shortly, and more recently, Arthur Knight's *Disintegrating the Musical*).³⁵ As many dance theorists and tap dancers have commented, as a cultural form tap dancing often fared poorly in Hollywood, and did so on a number of fronts. As previously mentioned, African-American tap dancers – major players in the development of tap dancing in the USA – were rarely given much space on screen and were generally sidelined into novelty numbers. In addition, the tap that came to dominate the screen was often less rhythmically complex than that which was seen in the black clubs and on the streets. This is not to say, however, that the forms of tap being developed in black vernacular culture – on the street corners, in theatres on the TOBA (Theatre Owners and Bookers Association) circuit as well as in the Harlem nightclubs – did not have an impact on shaping Hollywood dance numbers. White stars not only attended the Harlem and downtown clubs where tap and tap-based dance were flourishing (most notably, but by no means exclusively, the Cotton Club), they were also frequently trained by African-American dancers and incorporated these steps into their dances.³⁶ African-American

drawers that revealed witty legs. She smiled like a little monkey and said: 'Oh, Buddy has taught me such marvelous, new, dirty steps' (p. 164, italics in original).

- 37 Willie Covan moved to Hollywood in the 1930s. According to Rusty E. Frank, Covan became head dance instructor at MGM at 'Eleanor Powell's personal insistence'. See Frank's interview with Covan, 'From Pickaninny to the Palace', in *Tap!*, ch. 1.

- 38 See for instance Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema* (Chicago, IL and London: Chicago University Press, 1996). See also Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). While Studlar writes about the impact of the 'dance-mad teens' (p. 157) on Hollywood, her focus in this regard is Valentino and the tango.

- 39 Compare the Nicholas Brothers' famous leaping splits down the staircase in Stone's *Stormy Weather* with a remarkably unorthodox use of this step in his later film *Sensations* (1945). In the grand finale act of *Sensations* (an act that can hardly equal the Cab Calloway number that appears halfway through the film) about forty 'equestrian girls' do thumping leaping splits down the stadium seats in a particularly unspectacular build up to the film's closing dance number – Eleanor Powell dancing with a tap dancing horse.

- 40 Ralph Ellison, 'The golden age, time past', in Robert G. O'Meally (ed.), *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2001), p. 52.

dancers also choreographed many dance numbers in Hollywood musicals – Willie Covan (of The Four Covan's) was hired by MGM as its head dance instructor in the 1930s – as well as choreographing (uncredited) their own dances.³⁷

There are many reasons why the place of African-American vernacular dance in the Hollywood musical has received so little attention in contemporary film debates, from limited archival materials to institutional and disciplinary biases. Certainly the lack of adequate documentation of a lot of this work – partly as a result of uncredited labour – could hamper historical research in the field. Likewise, the more general dearth of work on the relations between vernacular dance and film has meant that any such study would be exploring relatively uncharted terrain. Even in the recent work on the impact of jazz and jazz culture on Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s, dance has been left on the margins.³⁸ But this history has faced another obstacle in film debates, an obstacle that is more to do with the lack of a conceptual framework to address much of this work. Many of the African-American-based dance styles that Hollywood drew on – from the Charleston to rhythm tap to the Jitterbug/Lindy Hop – are rhythmically complex. While these rhythms may often have been simplified in the move to film and in their mobilization in the film musical, one need only think of a dance number like that of the Nicholas Brothers in *Down Argentine Way* or in *Stormy Weather* to remember that the work of many of these dancers is characterized by the production and scoring of both visual and aural beats that surpass much else in cinema for their delirious temporal complexity. In their aerial steps they seem to stretch and suspend the fall of the beat for what feels like an eternity before falling into a thumping split only to rise again, as if pulled by an invisible thread that lifts the body into the vertical before yet again launching into movement.³⁹ While their feet give voice to the rhythms of the dance, the remarkable cross-rhythms that characterize their work arise not only through sound but visually as well. Through the mobilization and suspension of beats in different areas of the body, their steps produce visual beats that 'stir the eye's ear', to borrow a phrase from Ralph Ellison:⁴⁰ a torso appears to listen to a leg, a forearm summons a beat from a waist and responds with its own. In the process the image is often driven by opposing forces – the posture and form of one part of the dancing body stalls time while another part accelerates it. It is here that film theory falls short, for although questions of rhythm have had a lengthy, if somewhat eclectic, history in film debates – particularly in those of the historic avant-garde film movements and in proposals of a 'pure cinema' – the terms in which filmic rhythm has been proposed have tended to be very limited, with rhythm and meter often being equated. As a result, contemporary Anglo-US film theory remains sorely wanting when it comes to a conceptual language and framework to address issues of rhythm and, in particular, any kind of polyrhythm.

In his book *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze discusses Federico Fellini's *Orchestra Rehearsal* (a 1978 collaboration with Nino Rota) and describes the film's close as one in which 'time itself becomes a thing of sound'.⁴¹ While Deleuze does not even make passing mention of the Nicholas Brothers in his cinema books (despite his frequent references to the Hollywood musical) this phrase could also serve to describe much of the Nicholas Brothers' work on film, and possibly that of a number of other tap dancers of the time. With much of the Nicholas Brothers' film work, vision becomes a matter of listening and touch, the sounds of the steps coursing their way across both the image and the spectator's body, and each beat – whether visual or aural, suspended or released – is rendered tactile. If in the Nicholas Brothers' work time can be understood as becoming 'a thing of sound', it is because the present of the dance/performance is often splitting into two or more directions or voices: a suspended beat which seems to threaten the passing of the present and fuels the image with anticipation; and the point, marked by the too-late, where the beat did not fall. In aerial steps in which their bodies – seemingly indifferent to gravity – leap, fall and rise as if on nothing less than the pleasure of throwing beats back and forth between each other, as well as in steps that still one part of the body while animating another, the image is doubled by the knowledge and anticipated presence of that which does not occur – the 'timely' resolution of the beat.

Burn Hollywood Burn

Bamboozled and *Black or White*, mentioned earlier, both turn to the histories of African-American vernacular dance in Hollywood cinema: the former, an overt critique of the USA's film and television industries, in terms of the costs of minstrelsy; the latter in terms of the place of African-American dance and dancers in the Hollywood musical. Each film 'peaks' with a mute dance, a dance that is not so much silent (each of these dance numbers are, in fact, particularly loud) but which instead silences all else in the frame.

In *Bamboozled*, Manray, played by tap dancer Savion Glover, is a street tap dancer/hoofer who is drafted into the blackface role of Mantan in a television minstrel show. In the film's referencing of Sidney Lumet's *Network* (1976), Peter Finch's progressive performances of madness are replaced here with increasingly loud tap frenzies, as Manray-cum-Mantan (the character is named after comedian Mantan Moreland) interrupts the recording of the minstrel show in which he stars with an ammunition-like tap number. In this sequence, Glover's character refuses to don the mask of blackface, steps out of character, and takes the stage as himself. After delivering a spoken plea to the studio audience ('I'm sick and tired of being a

nigger and I'm not going to take it anymore') and falling into a faint, he then rises to unleash a heady, rhythmic assault, his body hurtling against gravity at a seemingly impossible speed. This dance sequence is both precise and frenzied, with Manray/Glover's body moving at such a pace that his movements appear as a series of brush strokes: the image, it seems, cannot keep up with the speed of this body and his moves seem to scar the image with gashes of colour. Performed in what seems to be (at least) quadruple time, this dance not only attempts to outstep the minstrel show's cooning beat but also to blast it asunder. As fast, perhaps, as Miller's machine-gun tapping and shot through with cross beats, the sounds of the taps seem to be amplified in this sequence until they fill the screen. The impact of this volume is certainly heightened by the fact that the dance comes after Manray's address to the studio audience, but it also sets the dance apart from his previous dances, both in and out of blackface, and the aural demands this number makes on the image and the spectator give it a privileged place in the film.

Bamboozled's story revolves around a television writer Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans) and his failed attempt to write a show that would be so offensive it would both bring down his employer and enable him to escape a contract binding him to producing television tedium. After proposing numerous programmes that his 'more nigga than thou' boss rejects (all deemed 'too whitebread'), Delacroix decides to go for broke with a blackface minstrel show, set on a watermelon plantation, complete with piccaninnies. Delacroix's problem is that the show is a hit, and everybody wants to be a nigger. It is, however, a controversial hit, attracting the ire of the Mau-Maus, a group of gangsta revolutionaries who kidnap Manray and assassinate him on a live web broadcast for the crime of cooning (which, in one of the film's most ironic moves, is also televised live to ensure that audiences without access to the web can nevertheless still have access to the snuff). Along the way the film sets out to chart the history of blackface and its place in US popular culture.

Marketed as a comedy, describing itself as a satire, and reviewed as a scathing attack on Hollywood and US media industries, the film is all of these things – and it is so, I would suggest, through its relation to the backstage musical. Like the studio-era musical, the film consists of various theatrical and musical numbers, including the 'variety' acts that comprise the auditions for the television show, the club act of Delacroix's standup comic father Junebug, the television commercial parodies (of 'Timmi Hillnigger' street wear and 'Da Bomb' malt liquor), and the rehearsals and performances for the television show itself. But while the film deploys many of the elements of the backstage 'putting on a show' musical, it is in many ways an anti-musical: reversing the formula of the backstage musical, here it is precisely the show ('Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show') that ruptures

the fantasy of community, separates the romantic couple and stops the music.

The film is threaded through by references to a number of other films about the film and television industries, most notably, Lumet's *Network* and Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd* (1957).⁴² *Bamboozled* makes many references to *Network*, particularly through the character Mantan's speeches and faints and by invoking many of the earlier film's plot devices and scenes, but Lee's film is by no means a remake, and attempting to make sense of it through *Network* is not very productive. While both films address the television industry's ability to package and sell spectacle – oracular madness in *Network*, blackface in *Bamboozled*, buffoonery in each – Lee's film is primarily concerned with the living history of blackface and its offshoots in US media culture. Yet it is also here that the film seems to be most undecided. It is unsure, in short, of what it wants to do with this history and the material that it cites.⁴³ Arthur Knight has argued that the film can be seen as 'a game of referentiality, meaning, and connection. At stake in the game is nothing less than how to remember the past ... while moving on.'⁴⁴ But *Bamboozled* must then be understood as a particularly precarious game, for its form of quotation tends to reduce most, if not all, of its references to the same level, and one is left wondering whether for this film the role of the entertainer is so marked by minstrelsy that it is both irredeemable and futile terrain for critical work when set against the minstrelizing practices of America's media industries. For instance, while the routines for Mantan and his sidekick 'Sleep 'n' Eat' are largely based in black vaudeville acts from the 1920s to the 1950s – in particular, the 'Indefinite Talk' acts of Aubrey Lyles and Flournoy Miller, and later Miller and Nipsey Russell, which were central to the evolution of African-American comedy⁴⁵ – the film pays little attention to the critical relation these acts had to the tradition of minstrelsy. 'A Bojangles performance is excellent vaudeville', wrote Alain Locke of Bill Robinson in 1937. 'But listen with closed eyes, and it becomes an almost symphonic composition of sounds. What the eye sees is the tawdry American convention; what the ear hears is the priceless African heritage.'⁴⁶ *Bamboozled*, I would suggest, mourns what it sees but is perhaps less attentive to what it hears.

But while *Bamboozled* is not particularly attentive to the varied sounds and beats of black blackface minstrelsy or African-American screen tap, and thus tends to collapse these works as all 'losing out' to the demands of film and television industries, the film itself is structured through the collision of different rhythms, and it is through this collision that the film stages its critique and makes its charges. *Bamboozled* relentlessly juxtaposes different rhythms – rhythms of speech (the phat beats of the Mau Mau's versus the clipped speech of Delacroix), visual and graphic rhythms (the consistently unbalanced video shots of Delacroix with the executive producer Dunwitty versus the classically framed film shots of the 'Mantan' show), and most

⁴² *Bamboozled* is dedicated to the scriptwriter for *A Face in the Crowd*, Budd Schulberg.

⁴³ Likewise, it becomes increasingly unclear just how knowledgeable the film's central character Delacroix is about the acts and histories that he mobilizes in his satire. In the film's script, Delacroix speaks of his aims for the programme and how he understands its incendiary work on a number of occasions. In the film itself many of these lines have disappeared, and with them a sense of the character's knowledge of the material and history that he is mobilizing (this critical, knowing voice is shifted to Delacroix's assistant Sloan).

⁴⁴ Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, p. 242.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of these acts and their place in the history of American humour, see Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying and Signifying the Underground Tradition of African-American Humor that Transformed American Culture, from Slavery to Richard Pryor* (New York, NY: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1994) ch. 4.

⁴⁶ Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, DC: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), p. 135. This passage is also quoted in Vail S. Hill, *Brotherhood in Rhythm*, pp. 29–30.

centrally, the rhythms of Manray's dancing with the mechanical rhythms of the 'coon' toys or black collectibles. This juxtaposition of different rhythms gives the film an unsettling quality. Constantly shifting from one rhythm to another, the film refuses to let the spectatorial body relax or succumb to a beat without knowing that beat's agenda. While there are certainly points in the film where these rhythmic juxtapositions seem less part of the film's overall project than a result of an at times stodgy script, it is nevertheless here, in the film's conflicting rhythms, that *Bamboozled* undertakes its most interesting work.

Of these various rhythmic juxtapositions, it is that between the hooper and the 'coon' automatons that lies at the heart of the film. Through this juxtaposition the film undertakes its most serious charge against the Hollywood film industry, aligning the automated, repetitive movements of the mechanical toys with Hollywood and US media culture more generally. This juxtaposition is brought to a head in the relationship between Manray's mute dance and the film's coda. *Bamboozled* closes with a melancholic and disarming montage sequence which is divided into two parts. The first part summons from Hollywood's archives a seemingly endless stream of blackface images, scenes from cartoons, silent and sound films and television shows which are not ordered chronologically but linked by their movements. In a film as relentlessly and awkwardly static as *Bamboozled*, the lyrical, almost buoyant, movement of these images, cut to a regular beat, is particularly disarming and adds to the sequence's melancholy feel. The second part of this closing sequence, which runs with the film's credits, departs from the filmic and televisual material and consists of a montage sequence of various black collectibles – turn-of-the-century cast iron and ceramic figures of sambos, mammies and piccanninies and mechanical tin toys that perform on demand, requiring nothing more than a turn of a key. Riding upon the soundtrack's exquisite song (Bruce Hornsby's *Shadowlands*) and shown against a neutral backdrop, the automated movement of these toys is rendered both ghostly and ominous. Minstrelsy, *Bamboozled* implies, does not only efface through defacement and theft, it animates the subject with a deathly beat, tainting all in its field.

Bamboozled makes its strongest claims against blackface through this juxtaposition of Mantan's mute dance and the film's closing montage. While in his enraged mute dance Manray attempts to break out of the deadening (and circular) time of blackface by accelerating his steps to the point where they can no longer be registered visually, the closing montage charts the repetitive, ghostly beat of the automaton, the very beat that the film aligns with minstrelsy and its costs. What we find in this juxtaposition is something similar to Deleuze's proposal of the two aspects of the crystal image. As Deleuze writes:

The crystal image is as much a matter of sound as it is optical, and Felix Guattari was right to define the crystal of time as being a 'ritornello' par excellence. Or, perhaps, the melodic ritornello is only a musical component which contrasts and is mixed with another, rhythmic component: the gallop. The horse and the bird would be two great figures, one of which carries away and speeds up the other, but the other of which is reborn from itself up to the final destruction or extinction (in many dances, an accelerated gallop comes as the conclusion of figures of rounds). The gallop and the ritornello are what we hear in the crystal, as the two dimensions of musical time, the one being the hastening of the presents which are passing, the other the raising or falling back of pasts which are preserved.⁴⁷

47 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 92–3

Deleuze opens his discussion of the gallop and the ritornello by addressing their relation to cinema music which, he writes, often 'tends towards releasing the ritornello and the gallop as two pure and self sufficient elements', and offers as an example musical comedy 'where the rhythmic stepping and walking, which is sometimes military, even for the girls, come up against the melodic song'. 'It is these tendencies', Deleuze writes, 'that achieve perfect expression when the cinematographic image becomes crystal-image' where they can either fuse or be distinct. 'In Ophüls the two elements fuse in the identification of the round with the gallop, while in Renoir and Fellini they are distinct, one of them taking on to itself the force of life, the other the power of death'.⁴⁸ What Deleuze identifies here as the two dimensions of musical time – the gallop, or the 'hastening of the presents which are passing' and the ritornello as the 'raising or falling back of pasts which are preserved' – could also describe the relationship between Manray's dance and the closing montage sequence. But in *Bamboozled* both the gallop (Manray's mute dance – which is also, like the ritornello, a return – that attempts to outstep minstrelsy) and the ritornello of the coda are marked by death, and they are so because each is marked by the temporality that the film associates with film and television's rhythmic regimes. As the film draws to a close with its final credits, the mechanical toys take on the function of a death mask.

48 Ibid., p. 93

While in *Bamboozled* the ritornello and the gallop (each of which leads to death) are separated across the film, in Michael Jackson's music video's mute dance, these two forces are set against each other within the film clip's central dance number. Like a number of Jackson's earlier music videos, *Black or White* from his album *Dangerous* was released with much fanfare. With a worldwide release date and considerable prerelease hype, the film received a degree of media attention rare for a music video. The film met with a public outcry about its final sequence – an outcry which focused on both Jackson's crotch-grabbing and his smashing of KKK-inscribed car and

shop windows. Like *Thriller* and a number of his music videos since, *Black or White* can be considered a key episode in a larger work that we could call 'Hollywood according to Michael Jackson': *Thriller* turns to the B-grade zombie film, and *Beat It* (through its restaging of *West Side Story*), like *Black or White*, turns to the musical. But it would be a mistake to see these generic references as simply the 'settings' for various Jackson songs – each of these music videos, to a different degree, rewrites the genre that it deploys.

Black or White is primarily remembered for its morphing sequence in which various faces are digitally melded (and indeed it is this sequence that was incorporated into the televised version of Michael Jackson's thirtieth anniversary concert). But the sequence that I want to focus on here is the film's closing 'mute dance', what was ludicrously referred as the 'panther dance', and which was censored from being screened in the clip for some time. The music video opens with a shot from the heavens, rapidly traveling through space to an American suburban home and finally reaching Macaulay Culkin in his bedroom listening to heavy metal, responding to his father's request to turn it down by blasting him through the roof with a wall of sound. The clip then moves in to what in many ways could be considered to be a satiric response to the opening of *That's Dancing* (the tribute to the musical which ends with Jackson's *Beat It* music video). After a montage of highlights from Hollywood musicals, *That's Dancing* begins its history with a Cook's Tour of 'primitive' and 'ethnic' dance, accompanied by a predictable explanatory voiceover from Gene Kelly. In *Black or White*, after being blasted through his suburban roof, the white father lands in the middle of a desert in 'Africa', where he soon becomes an audience to group of African dancers, who are in turn soon joined by Jackson, and the dance steps seem to arise from the meeting of bodies and differences. As the dancers depart from the shot, the out of frame turns out to be another set (and renders the previous location as a set) and Jackson now dances, once again in a hybrid step, with a group of Balinese dancers and then with a group of native American dancers, dressed as Hollywood Indians, in what turns out to be a film shoot: Jackson and the others dance on a raised stage in the midst of the American West, as indifferent to the scurry of Hollywood Indians on horseback that rush before them as they are to the film supposedly in production. The film continues in this fashion, as Jackson dances with an Indian woman performing a traditional dance on a freeway, the two melding their steps just as the morphing sequence melds faces, and then with a group of Russian dancers performing a Kazotsky Kick.

In the final section of the film, as we move from the morphing into a 'behind the scenes' shot of the sequence's supposed production (where we see not the digital work undertaken on the shots but the filming of the faces), a panther moves through the set and out into a back alley where it then transforms into Jackson. At this point the song stops – no minor point in a music video – and we move into a remarkable four-

minute solo dance number in which Jackson, who Hirshey so aptly calls 'the best, the brightest practitioner of Pentecostal dance boogie since James Brown',⁴⁹ performs a tap dance in the dark alley. One of the most remarkable aspects of this dance is the way that it is structured around sounds. In this sequence the steps of the dance – and the movement of the body more generally – are crisply audible: each sound is isolated and foregrounded and given a heightened sonic definition, whether it be that of Jackson's feet on the bitumen, the wind against his shirt, or of his hands beating out rhythm on a body that seems to be wired for sound.

The use of sound in this sequence has much in common with what Chion has called a 'micro-rendering of the hum of the world', a sonic transformation which he sees as central to the 'quiet revolution' taking place in cinema through the shifting place and nature of sounds. As Chion writes:

since the minor denizens of high registers have entered films (even in standard mono versions), along with them has come another materiality, another rendering of life. I am not talking particularly of the spatial effects of stereo, or Dolby thunder, but of a micro-rendering of the hum of the world, which locates the film in the ultra-present indicative, declines it in the ultra-concrete.⁵⁰

The crisp, amplified sounds of the dance here – both those arising from the impact of Jackson's body on the space and its objects and those of the space on his body – temporalize the dance and the image in complex ways. For while these sounds may locate 'the film in the ultra-present indicative', and indeed seem to puncture the image itself, the sounds themselves operate as sonic traces of earlier dancers and dances, traces that the dance summons and makes audible from this set-like space.

Black or White could also be called, like Public Enemy's song, 'Burn Hollywood Burn'. As Clover has argued in her magnificent essay 'Dancin' in the rain', the closing dance of *Black or White* addresses the elided history of black dance in the Hollywood musical through its references to *Singin' in the Rain*.⁵¹ The focus of Clover's essay is not with *Black or White* however, but rather with the ways that *Singin' in the Rain* is haunted by that which, like most Hollywood musicals, it both deploys and suppresses – black vernacular dance. As Clover argues, for all its thematic concern with ownership, *Singin' in the Rain*'s 'concern with miscredit has a racial underside – that its real subject is not white women's singing voices, but black men's dancing bodies'.⁵² It is a film, she argues, that 'worries rather openly about the "authorship" of certain of the moves [its dancers] perform, that it is haunted by an anxiety of influence of a peculiarly American sort'.⁵³ In short, it worries about the fact that 'too many of the unseen artists whose moves have been put to such brilliant and lucrative use in the "white dancer's field" of the film musical are black'.⁵⁴

50 Michel Chion, 'Quiet revolution and rigid stagnation', trans. Ben Brewster, *October*, no. 58 (1991), pp. 69–80, p. 70

51 Clover, 'Dancin' in the rain', pp. 722–47

52 *Ibid.*, p. 737

53 *Ibid.*, p. 727

54 *Ibid.*, p. 729

Clover identifies a number of ways that *Singin' in the Rain*'s 'anxiety of influence' manifests itself in the film and the ways it seems to be haunted by the black dancing bodies and dance styles that it renders invisible. But in the closing section of her essay she turns to *Black or White*, which, she argues, references Donen's and Kelly's musical in its final sequence. As Clover argues, *Black or White* raises the ghosts of *Singin' in the Rain* through the location of the dance (a street set) and its props (the hat, the lamppost). But it also recalls *Singin' in the Rain* through the dance itself, as Jackson picks up on some of the same gestures and moves of the earlier film, but rather than rendering these steps fluid, they are interrupted and fragmented. In this respect the choreography of this dance is also fundamentally tied to sound, and one of the key ways that the sequence rewrites the earlier film is, in fact, through the central place it gives to the sounds of the dance. One of the things that makes this sequence so remarkable – both as a dance and as a music video – is the way that Jackson becomes both a microphone and a sound transmitter, his body seemingly picking up different beats and rhythms in this space from across time. Jackson seems to build the dance from fragments of steps that appear to be broken and interrupted and that he tries on, or 'samples'. Sound operates here to bifurcate time, as the set, summoned from the musical's past and evacuated of both its white dancing bodies and its song, is infused by sounds in the music video's present which in turn make audible the traces of the Hollywood musical's past and its forgotten players.

Like *Bamboozled*, *Black or White* takes issue with the history of African-American tap-based dance in the Hollywood musical. *Bamboozled* looks at the costs, losses and dangers of wearing the mask, and aligns the beat of minstrelsy with the structuring of time and movement it associates with the film and television industries. In fact in many ways the film could be seen as locating a 'minstrelizing' beat in film and television, a beat that is figured as so powerful that it allows for no divergences from its path. In *Black or White* on the other hand (shot and in many ways premissed on the video image), what is rendered audible – through the fragmented movements and principle of interruption – are the polyrhythms and suspended beats of acts like the Nicholas Brothers, acts which both contest and play with the structuring of time associated with Taylorist-Fordist aesthetics by privileging and occupying fissures in time. Each film asks us to listen a little more closely to the rhythms and beats of musical entertainment.

A shorter version of this essay was presented at the 2002 Screen Conference. I would like to thank Therese Davis, Viki Dun, Cathy Vasseleu and anonymous *Screen* readers for their suggestions and comments on this essay.

The suspended spectacle of history: the tableau vivant in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio*

JAMES TWEEDIE

In the mid 1980s Caravaggio's work experienced a renaissance, as a major exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum in 1985 and a series of critical studies returned the artist to the centre of European and American art historical discourse. A new generation of artists and critics was forced to reconsider the painter's relevance, after an era dominated by minimalism and abstract expressionism, to the broader social project of discovering alternative histories of the early modern world. Debates amongst artists and critics surrounding the Metropolitan exhibition asked whether Caravaggio is 'our contemporary'¹ and a tutor figure for the successors of abstract expressionism,² or a poor draughtsman with a worse disposition, whose revival merely confirms that 'three hundred and seventy-five years have not dimmed [his work's] power to be showy, pushy, and hollow';³ or one of the last exponents of a tradition of artistic craftsmanship, which, far from contemporary, 'sadly is now past beyond recall'.⁴ Despite the vast separation in time between Caravaggio's late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century Italy and the moment of his revival, his artwork and biography were conscripted into a variety of contemporary struggles: his work became a corrective to formal impasses in abstract and neo-avant-garde art, and his life a model of rebellion and resistance important to revisionist histories of the early modern era. While professional *Caravaggisti* debated the merits of the few biographical sources concerning his sexuality, other scholars searched for gay shibboleths, for an anachronistically queer iconography scattered

1 James Gardner, 'Is Caravaggio our contemporary?', *Commentary*, June 1985, pp. 55–61

2 Frank Stella, 'Caravaggio', *The New York Times Magazine*, 3 February 1985, p. 1

3 Sanford Schwartz, 'Not happy to be here', *The New Yorker*, 2 September 1985, p. 75

4 Gardner, 'Is Caravaggio our contemporary?', p. 55

- 5 For an iconographic approach to the artist's biography, see Adrienne Von Lates, 'Caravaggio's peaches and academic puns', *Word and Image*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1995), pp. 55–60. For an overview of the debates about the artist's sexuality and an attempt to rebut Hibbard's argument, see Creighton E. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 191–238.
- 6 James M. Saslow, *Pictures and Passions: a History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts* (New York, NY: Viking, 1999), pp. 116–7.
- 7 Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 13.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Derek Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Caravaggio: the Complete Film Script and Commentaries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 75.

throughout his paintings.⁵ Although consideration of Caravaggio's sexuality will always involve a certain amount of speculation, his paintings often revolve around sexually inviting or challenging glances and gestures and incorporate an iconography associated with homoerotic subcultures of his time. Caravaggio's Victorious Cupid (c. 1601–2), writes one art historian, may preserve the 'slender thread of a rudimentary "homosexual tradition"' and mark 'the culmination and swan song of openly homosexual expression' in the baroque era.⁶ As recent critics have suggested, Caravaggio also inserts authorial signatures and self-portraits – including two as decapitated heads – into paintings that seem otherwise unconcerned with autobiography, establishing himself as one of the most self-revelatory of mannerist and baroque artists. For Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, conjecture about Caravaggio's sexual identity is unfortunate, no matter how well-founded, because it deprives the paintings of their 'intractably enigmatic quality'.⁷ They argue that 'Caravaggio's enigmatic bodies have not yet been domesticated by sexual – perhaps even gendered – identities'.⁸ But in comments on the conjectural nature of his screenplay for *Caravaggio* (1986), Derek Jarman emphasizes the interplay of biography and fiction in both his film and its necessarily ambiguous sources: 'The narrative of the film is constructed from the paintings. If it is fiction, it is the fiction of the paintings.'⁹ Given Caravaggio's penchant for self-revelation in his paintings, and given the paucity of other biographical information, those images become crucial testimony, ultimately producing a speculative account of the artist's life, but a 'fiction' grounded in the paintings. What is permissible in reconstructing the life of Caravaggio and what lessons his biography offers the present depend largely upon whether or not the paintings themselves count as historical documents and, if they do, whether or not history can incorporate those images without subordinating them to the texts they either bolster or contradict.

In Jarman's *Caravaggio* the tableau vivant serves as the medium for a history based on images: it becomes an interface between art and history, film and painting, the present and the past. One legacy of the political modernism of the 1970s was the assertion that politics originates in a bold and decisive break from the past; but Jarman's cinema acknowledges the impossibility, even undesirability, of that break for artists and activists hoping to discover and insert themselves within a community of opposition. Rather than rehearse the concerns of political modernism, *Caravaggio* posits the tableau vivant – a force of suspension and possible reorientation, a quotation that foregrounds difference as well as repetition, a medium of historical return that never sloughs off the mediating presence of actual bodies – as a successor to the ideology of the break. The foundational representational problem for Jarman's filmmaking is how to resolve the formal politics of political modernism and the exigencies of the present, in particular an oppositional queer politics centred on the archaeology of past identity

- 10 Terence Davies. Bill Douglas, Isaac Julien and Sally Potter are some of the British filmmakers who pursued related projects in the 1980s.
- 11 In 1987 the Local Government Bill passed by Parliament included a provision, known as Clause 28, prohibiting the 'promotion of homosexuality' and forbidding schools from teaching 'the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. For a discussion of the relationship between Jarman's cinema and queer politics in the 1980s, see Chris Lippard and Guy Johnson, 'Private practice, public health: the politics of sickness and the films of Derek Jarman', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993), p. 292.

- 12 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: NY: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 221.

formations and a genealogy of the present. The film's destruction of the organic, mimetic diegesis is reminiscent of similar tendencies in political modernism, but Jarman also establishes identification as a compelling aesthetic model, and alternates between extremes of distanciation and intimacy.¹⁰ In Jarman's mode of identity politics – specifically, queer activism during the height of the AIDS crisis and under Thatcherite governance – the rediscovery of identities submerged beneath dominant histories and a genealogy of current subcultures becomes an explosive political project.¹¹ Resistance has a history, the film suggests, though that history may remain obscured by centuries of accumulated discourses. The film reanimates gestures suspended on canvas since the cusp of the seventeenth century, subjecting those movements to the retrospective gaze of history and the prospective gaze of contemporary queer movements, joining the paradoxically future-oriented return to art history designed to recuperate Caravaggio for contemporary art and politics. The film reflects what might be called a mannerist sense of history, a recognition of, and struggle with, a past at once insistently present and necessarily estranged. It incorporates formal strategies of political modernism while infusing history into this formula, becoming a form of modernism with hindsight, with a historical dimension that allows for a return both to and of the past.

Benjamin writes that the 'authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced'.¹² But what constitutes the origin of a work of art, and how does it transmit its history? The historical project in *Caravaggio* centres on a succession of tableaux vivants because through these histrionic copies it alludes to a qualitatively different moment in the social life of art objects, when the artwork existed only as a work in progress. These tableaux shown on screen exist not as a conduit for the ostensible subject matter of the painting, the narrative announced in titles or museum placards, but instead initiate a speculative recreation of their immediate conditions of production. *Caravaggio* departs from one of the most conventional genres – the life of the absolute artist – and foregoes formal, biographical, iconographic or narrative modes of 'reading' pictures. Instead it focuses on the production of pictures, recreating them in studio settings to afford access to the moment at which a welter of social and economic forces, identities and desires were inscribed on canvas. Each tableau becomes a microcosm of Rome's sexual, economic and power relations, as the city's elite insinuate themselves into the lives of Caravaggio and his friends and therefore into the studio of the painter. Jarman uses the tableau vivant to suspend and expand time just before the completion of the painting, before the drama of the studio concluded in a completed picture and dissipated

13 Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

14 Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 206.

over centuries of interpretation. Just as linguistics provided the operative metaphor when critics in the 1970s reconstituted the 'language' of images, *Caravaggio* provides a realization of the project Joan Copjec alludes to when she exhorts us to become 'literate in desire'.¹³ The tableaux in Jarman's *Caravaggio* derive their power not from the privileged signifiers on their frames, but from the more intimate circumstances of the studio: the moment when the life of the artist – a story of both desire and the effect of power on that desire – was depicted on canvas.

But the narrative of Jarman's *Caravaggio* would be difficult to discern from standard biographical information on the artist, such as it is. Little is known about the life of Caravaggio because he left few of the written records normally used in the reconstruction of lives on the cusp of the seventeenth century. The primary contemporaneous documents of his life are police records, which hint at a narrative of habitual criminality, beginning with the peccadilloes of his youth, escalating gradually through an almost annual appearance before the magistrates for crimes such as a fight over a plate of artichokes, and culminating with the murder of Ranuccio Tommasoni – a crime which caused the artist to flee Rome in 1606, dying on the run four years later. Contemporary journalistic accounts and letters and later biographies confirm many of the salient facts, in particular the more sensational details of this well-documented fight: 'it has been a long time since we have had a dispute in Rome such as the one that took place on Sunday in Campomarzo between the painter Michelangelo da Caravaggio and a certain Ranuccio', reads one of the surviving primary sources.¹⁴ The film is most remarkable in its frequent departure from the well-known narrative of crimes and misdemeanours, a narrative that conforms very closely to romantic myths of the menacing artist in the Rimbaud mould, whose unstable behaviour bespeaks the peculiarity of an 'artistic sensibility'. Later biographers and critics have been forced to reconcile these salacious official accounts and the sketchy but intriguing story they imply, with the alternative eloquence of the primary extant autobiographical record: Caravaggio's paintings. A history of the completed canvases, of their exchange and ownership, is less schematic than the necessarily speculative biography, but that history only tangentially relates to the artist and his mode of production. The well-known biblical and classical tales related in the paintings also reveal little about the artist himself. The stories predate Caravaggio by centuries and he often rendered them in a contemporary idiom, clothing his characters in the garb of sixteenth-century Roman commoners and removing all of the conventional trappings of antiquity, escaping insofar as was possible the tyranny of stylistic and hermeneutic traditions enveloping those oft-painted stories. A formal account of styles, of Caravaggio's break with classicism and experiments with mannerism, also reveals little about the life of the artist, in the studio and elsewhere. The warp and woof of art and

commerce, styles and subjects, intersect with the canvas at various moments; but they can say little about Caravaggio himself beyond the strictly limited sphere of artistic patronage and the economics of art, the purely formal realm of individual and period style, or the usually uniform templates of iconography. Adhering only to the most authentic and incontrovertible evidence, Caravaggio's biography devolves into the story recorded and propagated by the official public discourse of police records and buyers and sellers of art.

Yet as Michael Fried argues in his 1997 essay on Caravaggio's often concealed and disguised self-portraits, many of Caravaggio's paintings contain lingering traces of the artist himself and hint at the particularities of his mode of production. Fried suggests, for example, that Caravaggio's *Boy Bitten By a Lizard* (c. 1596–7) is figured in the act of painting a self-portrait, of swiveling between a mirror and a canvas arranged at right angles, constructing a triangle, with the canvas and mirror offering two different takes on the artist/subject who occupies the third side.¹⁵ The eponymous boy's expression of shock is also a record of the painter's own discomfort at discovering the difference between the mirror image and the self-representation – in essence, having seen himself in his mirror or canvas, as though for the first time. De Certeau suggests that this dynamic of identification and estrangement became a signature theme in baroque art because 'probably no era was more conversant with the ruses of the image'.¹⁶ He writes that figurative representations became exercises in catoptromancy, or divination through mirrors, with the reflection representing not the imaginary fullness of identity but a 'doubling of the ego'. The mirror image enacts a complex process of dispersal whose stages de Certeau describes as follows:

What I see in the image of the other is me; I am not here where I am but elsewhere, in the mirror representing the absent other, and I didn't know it: this was the iconic theme of those years. The other who appears to me through vision is an unknown me.¹⁷

Fried's essay on Caravaggio also hinges on the expressions of shock and misrecognition that disfigure the artist's self-portraits and then on the artist's compulsion to inscribe himself on canvas despite these obvious misgivings. In most modern studies of the artist's work, Fried writes:

what by and large has not been recognized is that Caravaggio is one of those rare painters . . . whose paintings must be understood as evoking a primary, even primordial, relationship to the painter himself, who afterwards is succeeded, but never quite supplanted, by other viewers, by the viewer in general, in a word, by us.¹⁸

Jarman's film takes this proposition literally: it searches for the submerged autobiography inscribed on those canvases and reconstructs from these primary extant autobiographical records the 'primordial'

¹⁵ Michael Fried, 'Thoughts on Caravaggio', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1997), pp. 18–19.

¹⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable. Volume One, The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 276.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Fried, 'Thoughts on Caravaggio', p. 21.

relationship between Caravaggio and his work. If Caravaggio indeed inscribed so many traces of himself on his canvases, if scenes drawn from biblical sources include the face or telltale gestures of the artist, the obvious but ultimately unanswerable question is 'Why?' Jarman responds first with another question, asking why the paintings resort to strategies of obscurity and deferral. He echoes Foucault's observation on the possibility of subversion even within the rules of relatively circumscribed and inhospitable regimes:

The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules.¹⁹

The director suggests that his starting point in the construction of the narrative was 'a reading of the paintings' themselves, particularly Caravaggio's late depiction of David holding the head of Goliath, with its self-portrait as a decapitated head, and his Beheading of John the Baptist (1608), with a statement of incrimination and responsibility inscribed in the martyred saint's dripping blood: 'I, Michelangelo, did this'.²⁰ From these seminal facts, Jarman expands the film into a work of immanent picture theory, as it offers a 'reading' of the desire inscribed in this and other works and reconstructs a partial narrative to locate those desires. In a draft of his 'Theses on the philosophy of history', Benjamin wrote that 'the past has deposited in it images, which one could compare to those captured by a light-sensitive plate. Only the future has developers at its disposal which are strong enough to allow the image to come to light in all its details'.²¹ The representational problem at the core of Jarman's *Caravaggio* is how to materialize these vestiges of an unrealized past.

Frank Stella's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1983–84, which centred on Caravaggio's relevance to a generation of artists dealing with the institutionalization of abstract art, advanced a related thesis about the importance of the studio setting to an understanding of Caravaggio's art. For Stella, Caravaggio's belated reemergence affords an opportunity to appropriate his unique response to a classical tradition and his experimentation with mannerism in new contexts as a panacea to the excesses and limitations of postwar art. Stella's Norton Lectures and the subsequent published version, descriptively entitled *Working Space*,²² offer a more formalist parallel to Jarman's own project, as both elaborate a speculative relationship to Caravaggio and make contemporary an artist from a radically different historical era. Despite the differences between Stella's early minimalism and Jarman's more politically-oriented farrago of styles, Stella's

19 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in Paul Habinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 86

20 Derek Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, ed. Shaun Allen (London: Quartet Books, 1991), p. 14

21 Quoted in Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light. Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 86–7. In their description of the act of transporting Caravaggio's paintings into the anachronistic context of a film, Jarman's diaries echo Benjamin: 'I'm certain they will survive in the hurly burly of the modern world only by making Caravaggio a contemporary will we see how revolutionary a painter he was' Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, p. 24

22 Frank Stella, *Working Space: the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1983–4* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986)

Caravaggio bears a close resemblance to Jarman's. Both Stella's critical appreciation in the lectures and Jarman's film biography centre on 'working space' in several senses of the term. And because of his keen attention to the details of how a fellow artist worked, how the manipulations of the studio translated into shapes and colours on canvas, Stella moves backward in time from the frozen canvas to the configuration of models, the originary tableaux vivants, that became the Caravaggio paintings passed on through the centuries.

Beyond its repeated comparisons between Caravaggio's work and that of present-day abstract artists, Stella's book also reflects a fascination with the workings of the studio, and in particular the arrangement of artist and model that allowed Caravaggio to realize a complex framework of bodies. In critical accounts roughly contemporaneous with the paintings themselves Giovanni Baglione writes that Caravaggio's innovative chiaroscuro lighting derived in part from his peculiar configuration of models in the studio, as he lit scenes from above, through a skylight placed strategically in the ceiling. But Stella also provides a speculative reconstruction of the studio space, suggesting that the artist would situate himself between the canvas and the models, swiveling towards, then away from, the people recreating a dramatic scene before, then behind, him. Thus 'Caravaggio would be in the center of his universe, orchestrating the twin realities of pictoriality – subject and object – while his model/actors reveled in the immortalization of their own performance, watching themselves in Caravaggio's canvas mirror'.²³ If Stella's hypothesis is correct, then Caravaggio could have painted from carefully arranged tableaux vivants whose theatrical performance preceded the 'original' canvas.²⁴ For this reason the scene depicted on canvas becomes more than captured stillness, its players more than forms and shadows; the studio is transformed into a performance space, with the canvas akin to a reflective surface, or more accurately, a device for recording those patterns of light. Using the same metaphor – the mirror that 'retains the image' – that Bazin upholds as an essential characteristic of cinema,²⁵ Stella envisions the canvas almost as a protocinematic apparatus, capturing an event unfolding in time and promising immortality for those posing, though that event remains fossilized in sheets and layers, in a palimpsest rather than cinema's serial succession of frames. Stella praises Caravaggio's paintings for their ability to construct a pictorial space where this drama of the studio can unfold: first through his violation of the viewer's space by projecting an object or gestures forward in the composition, thereby breaking the plane of the picture; and second by delimiting that depth with a vague, unrealized backdrop, a conscious circumscription of Albertian perspective. Having identified a crisis in abstraction in his own era, a crisis attributable to an obsession with colour and surface, Stella beckons toward Caravaggio's canvases as a model for escaping the tyranny of pure surface. Caravaggio not only created 'a kind of pictoriality that had not existed

²³ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁴ Caravaggio's mode of painting would then have resembled that of the fictional artist Tonnere in Pierre Klossowski's *The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*. See *Roberte ce soir and The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1969), p. 99.

²⁵ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), p. 97.

26 Stella, *Working Space*, pp. 4, 12

27 Ibid., p. 17

28 Jarman's comments on the film cite Friedlaender's book as an important source in his research into the life and work of Caravaggio. See Walter Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955).

before', he also 'changed the way artists would have to think about themselves and their work. He made the studio into a place of magic and mystery, a cathedral of the self.'²⁶ As Stella's fantastic and mystifying language attests, these spaces are always imagined and hypothetical in retrospect. But the juxtaposition of these two spaces, the studio and the canvas, posits Stella's 'working space' as the site where the personal intersects with the materiality of the medium, where the necessarily ephemeral inscribes itself upon the potentially enduring, where the past is translated into a present suspended in emergence. Of the paintings in the Contarelli Chapel, he writes: 'Even though we know it is not possible, we sense that we are close to the moment when these paintings were made. We feel that we want to leave the church immediately; we would like to locate the place and fix the moment where and when these paintings were made.'²⁷ That moment of production, when the space of the studio enters that of the canvas, is also the object of the beholder's desire in Stella's account: it is something we 'would like to locate ... and fix', something 'close' but always elusive, something endlessly receding before us. This moment is also the subject of Jarman's film, and the tableau vivant becomes its means of representation.

Stella's book does not advance a new argument about Caravaggio's treatment of space; this discussion of pictorial space was standard commentary in the earliest monographs on the subject, particularly in Friedlaender's *Caravaggio Studies*, written thirty years before Stella's lectures. When Jarman first undertook the project for *Caravaggio*, he read Friedlaender's book, and perhaps incorporated the argument about pictorial space into his filmmaking practice.²⁸ But while Friedlaender argues that Caravaggio's work gestures always towards an *hors champ*, a transcendent sphere where the artist's lingering religiosity could reside, Stella focuses on the space inside the bounds of the canvas and on the 'cathedral' an individual artist constructs there. Jarman performs one further transformation. For him the studio is not only a place where the artist inscribes the self on canvas, it is also a social space; at once an escape from, and a microcosm of, the social forces at work outside that seeming refuge. Jarman and cinematographer Gabriel Beristain have received praise from most reviewers for the faithful rendering of Caravaggio's lighting and modeled figures, but with its depthless dimensions the film also recalls Caravaggiesque space, as the artist infamous for his refusal or inability to master Albertian perspectival paradigms also evokes a strictly limited, forward-reaching rather than infinitely receding space. This 'authenticity' is due, in part, to the exigencies of production: the film was made for half a million pounds in six weeks in a warehouse in the Isle of Dogs, London, and as a result features no Italian landscape. But this construction of intimate, domestic, bodily space also introduces the film's thematics from the outset. Within that space *Caravaggio* presents tableaux vivants designed to reinsert the personal, the body and the social sphere into

the masterpiece whose timeless canonicity depends on the suppression of such ephemera.

In the periods of their utmost popularity, critics evaluated performances of tableaux vivants according to strict criteria: their precision in reproducing a familiar work of art; their faithfulness to an original; their capacity to evoke the presence of that original despite the distance of a country or continent. When constructed in accordance with these standards, the tableau vivant copies paintings, embodies inaccessible artworks, performs scenes from literary classics, or composes a compressed theatrical miniature, approximating under adverse conditions the sort of dramatic action best captured in full throttle on stage. The tableau as embodied masterpiece succeeds when it defers to the original, when it remains faithful to its source, when it basks in the aura of art. These paintings on tour once served as an early museum without walls, affording access to otherwise sequestered or distant works of art. Goethe, for example, wrote enthusiastically about the dramatic attitudes of Emma Lyon as an embodiment of his theory of performance. The attitude begins to mould the body into an imitation of a classical prototype, and 'by performing the classical body, one can bring an effective gravity, a "celestial" aspect to the event. By imitating the fibre of antiquity's statues, the performer is able to elevate her work and evoke awe and wonder from her audience.'²⁹ This variation on the tableau vivant allows the performer to become 'a classical statue brought to life, a revitalized antiquity'.³⁰ But it also reinforces through repetition an already prevalent conception of a particular cultural heritage. It reinscribes the boundaries of that heritage by inhabiting the artworks that bear repeating for two overlapping and ultimately indistinguishable reasons: because of their intrinsic worth and because they 'belong' to their audience and performers. As the actors inhabit a tableau vivant and the audience recognizes its allusion, the original also inhabits them, constituting them as an audience through those very acts of repetition and recognition. The performance of the tableau vivant becomes an exercise in the installation and indoctrination of cultural heritage and an occasion for the conspicuous display of cultural capital.

But despite, or even because of, its belated, ancillary relationship to more established art forms, the tableau vivant can also exploit its difference to construct a hybrid between art and commentary. It can capitalize on its definitionally prescribed departure from an ideal by emphasizing its difference, highlighting its constitutive falsity until it verges on the camp or the grotesque. It becomes both a means of revenge on the ideal that remains the exclusive right of the original and a celebration of the copy precisely because it marks the limits, and ultimately the failure and collapse, of that ideal. Benjamin's book on the *Trauerspiel* foregrounds the use of tableaux on the baroque stage, arguing that beyond their stunning visual impact, their capacity for raw

²⁹ Volker Schachenmayr, 'Emma Lyon, the attitude, and Goethean performance theory', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1997), p. 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

31 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p. 195

32 Jean-François Lyotard, 'Acinema', trans. Paisley N. Livingston, in Philip Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: a Film Theory Reader* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 351

33 Geoffrey Hartman, 'The voice of the shuttle: literature from the point of view of language', *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 352

34 *Ibid.*, p. 339

spectacle, these stilled and assiduously arranged bodies occupy a crucial position within the thematic and aesthetic structures of baroque drama. According to a study cited by Benjamin, the *Trauerspiel* becomes virtually synonymous with the tableau vivant, with the former presenting a succession of still scenes modeled after paintings. A *Trauerspiel*, writes its author, is 'an allegorical painting executed with living figures, and with changes of scene. The spoken word makes no pretence to be dialogue; it is only a commentary on the images, spoken by the images themselves'.³¹ While they foreground their status as quotations from canonical works of European art, the tableaux vivants in *Caravaggio* also become mourning plays for the history elided in the translation of experience to canvas. In the process, these camp and grotesque tableaux highlight the extravagance of their often elaborately posed and constructed sources; they insinuate themselves back into their sources, unveiling the constitutive excess, the inherent falsity always present in the ideal and the original. They exact revenge by exposing the penchant for excess in the more established media and canonical artworks imperfectly approximated. Jean-François Lyotard invokes a potentially transgressive variation on the tableau vivant in his 1973 essay 'Acinema', which considers alternative strategies available to filmmakers at the outset of postmodernity and gestures towards 'two directions', 'two seemingly contradictory currents' energizing 'whatever is intense in painting today' and the 'truly active forms of experimental and underground cinema'.³² Lyotard identifies these 'poles' as 'immobility and excessive movement', and he cites the tableau vivant as one example of postmodern immobility, situates cinematic 'abstraction' at the opposite pole, and anticipates a 'libidinal' cinema able to match the 'drift of desire' that characterizes the work of his most revered artists. Jarman's *Caravaggio* originates in the unlikely pairing of art history and the 'drift of desire' and becomes a speculative history of desire's static traces.

Caravaggio opens with a closeup of the artist's head, in a deathly aspect, with one eye closed and the other fixed in a distant stare that recalls the decapitated head in David with the Head of Goliath (c. 1609–10), the self-portrait conflating death and desire that sparked Jarman's interest in the submerged biography hinted at in this and other pictures. A beginning that foreshadows the death of the title character is obviously a privileged moment in a narrative, and this premonition recalls Geoffrey Hartman's theory of narratological ends and beginnings: 'Stories begin with something ... that means too much', he writes.³³ In 'The voice of the shuttle' he elaborates a rhetorical figure from Sophocles into a more general theory of 'poetical and figurative speech' and, ultimately, narrative structure, when he writes that all literature occupies the space between 'overspecified ends and indeterminate middles'.³⁴ This model also serves as the narrative

structure of *Caravaggio* as a whole, as the story follows a dilatory path through discrete moments in the painter's life, always leading towards the inescapable historical fact of Caravaggio's early death on a beach at Porto Ercole. Immediately after Caravaggio's deathly countenance disappears from the screen, the film translates this structural principle, this demarcation of overdetermined poles surrounding an elided middle, into spatial terms. In the left foreground his assistant, Jerusaleme, sits carving wood at an out-of-focus table that threatens to spill over into the viewing space, to pierce the plane of the screen. In the right background, lying in a bed placed against a mottled grey back wall, Caravaggio marks the furthest extent of the film's depth of field (figure 1). In the foreground, the beginning, the mute act of creativity and craftsmanship; in the background, the death of the artist, the event that anchors his elusive biography in an overarching historical narrative. The camera distorts in this opening shot, as the empty room provides no waymarks to allow for steady passage between these two poles; depth perception is impossible, as it would be with Caravaggio's one-eyed visage. And in between these two characters, spaces and times, lies the elided middle where the rest of the film occurs. Like the painter whose biography it narrates, the film pries apart these two planes and creates a middle space where the action literally *takes place*.

Caravaggio's paintings have been praised and criticized for their tendency to transform sacred stories into genre scenes, for their rendering of the most charged moments of biblical history in a domestic idiom. They present a series of epiphanic moments in everyday settings, situating scenes of revelation in a manger or tavern. These humbled stories take place within an equally humble space that foregoes the illusions of infinite regress and intersects with the viewer's

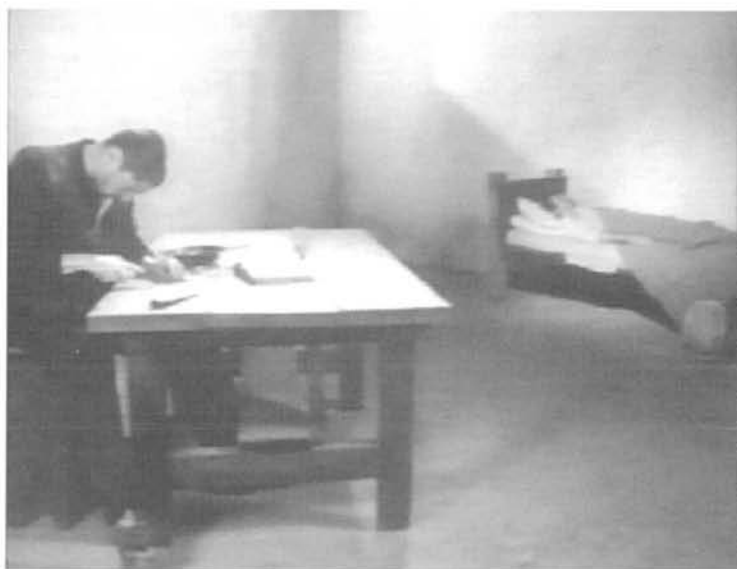


Figure 1

³⁵ Quoted in W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Spatial form in literature: toward a general theory', in Mitchell (ed.), *The Language of Images* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 275

³⁶ Foucault, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', p. 89.

³⁷ Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, p. 40

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72

world through a contiguity with the viewing space. This distinction between the system of Albertian perspective and Caravaggio's forward projection recalls Newton's discourse on 'absolute' and 'relative' spaces. Newton writes: 'Absolute space in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable. Relative space is some moveable dimension or measure of the absolute spaces; which our senses determine by its position to bodies; and which is commonly taken for immovable space'.³⁵ The space of Jarman's *Caravaggio* asserts the triumph of the body and the relative space it defines, inviting the viewer's involvement not through incorporation into a larger system, but by transforming the space of the film into the human, bodily space of the audience. 'Effective history', writes Foucault, 'shortens its vision to those things nearest to it – the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies';³⁶ and the film's presentation of history focuses primarily on these more mundane activities and the locations in which they unfold. The manufactured depth of the filmic image often constructs an illusion of enlightenment, an illusion that knowledge abides somewhere in these protracted spaces, waiting to be discovered. Bersani and Dutoit emphasize that Caravaggio's aversion to Albertian space signals a departure from paradigms centred on knowledge and an embrace of 'the relationality that constitutes the human as we know it'.³⁷ 'Art illuminates relationality by provisionally, and heuristically, immobilizing relations', they write.³⁸ The space in *Caravaggio* occupies the opposite extreme from the Albertian model and its promise of knowledge in depth. The film's chronically foreclosed space advertises the absence of knowledge immediately accessible by scanning or by further receding into the visual field, suggesting that the film's answers exist in another locus altogether, in the bodily and relational space where the action unfolds. The principal characters reinforce this foregrounding of relational space by appearing to ignore the presence of the camera as they enter and exit the frame not through theatrical wings but from the space behind the camera. Lena, for example, enters the film during the boxing match between Ranuccio and the bartender, and she appears first as a hand, implying a body that extends somewhere out into the viewing space. And perhaps more than any character, Jerusalem seems oblivious to the presence of the camera and the integrity of the frame; he exists in a network of relations with the film's other characters and a space that extends not back into the image but from the foreground forward. Rather than supply knowledge according to the framing and spatial priorities of the apparatus, each of these bodies is a phenomenon of relationality.

This emphasis on relative space and relations among bodies also translates into a concern with the everyday economy of art production, as the demands of patrons and the power structures of the larger society are implicated in the life of the studio. Jerusalem, a mute boy adopted by the artist to serve as an assistant and the only completely fictional

character in Jarman's account, supports the domestic economy of artistic production, as he grinds pigments and mixes the paints, a form of silent participation all the more poignant because portraits of the artist at work too often elide this role. As Benjamin writes in his 'Theses on the philosophy of history', cultural treasures 'owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries'.³⁹ One peril of the simulacrum is its separation from the individuals and the labour that produced it; the danger is less the absence of an original than a denial of origins. *Caravaggio* situates the labour of artistic production at the centre of art historical discourse, countering the threat of sourceless simulation with yet another copy, the tableau vivant, whose embodiments emphasize that the painting is not mechanically or digitally simulated but *made*. Jerusaleme's presence beside the tableau vivant locates the 'voice' of these anonymous contributors somewhere outside the dominant linguistic order, in an alternative signifying system to which the body serves as the primary ingress. Alternating and in tension with the mocking superficiality of its mise-en-scene, so riddled with anachronisms and the trappings of 1980s bourgeois existence, the exigencies of Caravaggio's daily work also assume an important position in the film, especially through his relationship with Jerusaleme. Because the tableau vivant exists in several tenses at once – in the present of the performance, in the past viewed through historical representation, and in the future perfect, through which characters overlap with the paintings and historical figures that will have been – it allows the work that produced the painting to coincide with a premonition of the final product.

Those overlapping time frames signal Jarman's departure from Stella's model of the Caravaggiesque studio: not only a cathedral of the self, the studio is also a workshop, a space where the exigencies of art, desire and commerce intertwine in the simultaneously social and personal act of artistic production. The simultaneousness inherent in the tableau is revealed most explicitly when Cardinal Del Monte enters the studio to examine a work in progress and causes the models to snigger. Acting as the Cardinal's surrogate and therefore implicating himself in the systems of power at work in this mode of production, Caravaggio bellows, 'You are paid to be still'. And in the most explicit visualization of the convergence of money, power, desire and art, Caravaggio literally feeds coins to Ranuccio as he poses for *The Martyrdom of St Matthew* (1599–1600). Ranuccio is at once the model for Matthew's executioner in the unfinished picture, a desired and desiring subject, and the recipient of funds funneled through the artist into the production of a work of art, investment and propaganda. The model thus exists at the site where these several narratives converge, and it is impossible to extricate one of those functions at any discrete moment. And Caravaggio himself fills a similarly complex multiplicity

40 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', p. 79

of roles, all constructed and produced within the discourses of power everywhere enveloping him. With the canvases all becoming the property of someone else and the models becoming hired hands, the paintings themselves reflect this sense of alienation. If these paintings are supposed to serve as an avenue into a submerged biography of the artist, they reveal instead the labyrinth of discourses surrounding and converging in each work of art. If these paintings are meant to afford access to an elusive, originary moment in the social life of the artwork, they instead reveal that what 'is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of things. It is disparity'.⁴⁰ As Caravaggio incorporates blood into the surface of his canvases, as Ranuccio's pounding of his head against a prison wall is juxtaposed with the artist pounding his head against a canvas, as the dead body of Lena is used as a model for the Death of the Virgin (c. 1605–6), the extremity of the artist's attempts to overcome that alienation becomes apparent. The *tableau vivant* exists in a liminal state, with its living figures suspended among the vitality of the theatrical and the stilling of life on canvas and the eventual crystallization of the art object: the *tableau vivant* is always also a *tableau mourant*. Only the artist's literal incorporation of bodies in the painting can mark them as irrevocably his. And if, as Foucault writes, genealogy is charged with exposing 'the body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body', Caravaggio also lays bare the artist's desperate attempts to inscribe traces of that body into those seemingly impermeable official discourses.⁴¹

41 Ibid., p. 83.

This economic exchange between Caravaggio and Ranuccio also introduces the film's peculiar pattern of editing, which replicates the triangular configuration of characters introduced in the earliest moments. In the scene where Caravaggio first sees Ranuccio and Lena at the boxing match, a succession of closeups – each of the lovers, then Caravaggio – culminates not in the expected closeup of Ranuccio, but in a medium-shot of Ranuccio and Lena, into which Caravaggio strolls from behind the camera, creating a triangle centred on the money offered to the victorious fighter. After the introduction of the basic structure, the film continues its radical departure from shot/reverse-shot patterns, usually through some triangulation of that bipolar standard. As Caravaggio and Jerusaleme clean Lena's body, for example, the progression of shots alternates between closeups of the members of the love triangle and medium shots of the artist caressing the body. As other characters interpolate themselves into the orbit of these relationships – as Ranuccio is displaced by Scipione Borghese, for example – a new triangle is constructed – with Borghese and Caravaggio the new pair of rivals. Or when Pipo enters the narrative, establishing herself as a rival to Lena, she replicates her rival's infatuation with Caravaggio's money and art. This pattern of editing begins to resemble the structural principles elaborated by René Girard

⁴² René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). Timothy Murray notes the relationship between the love triangle represented in *Caravaggio* and the paradigm set forth in Girard's study. He also compares Girard's model with that proposed by Luce Irigaray who suggests that woman becomes the abject element in these diagrams of triangular desire because she serves as a token and provocation of male desire while being denied desire herself. See Murray, *Like a Film: Ideological Fantasy on Screen, Camera, and Canvas* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 134.

⁴³ Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 4 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, in which he posits triangular desire as the ur-principle of the novelistic regime.⁴² For Girard, despite romantic insistence on the autonomy of desire, on the direct connection between a desiring subject and its object, desire is always defined 'according to Another' and 'opposed to this desire according to Oneself' that most of us pride ourselves on enjoying'.⁴³ Girard's term for that other is a 'mediator', and the demonstrated interest of this figure serves to foment desire, to render the object 'infinitely desirable'. And as that mediator becomes more of an obstacle to any ultimate fulfillment, 'envy, jealousy and rivalry' begin to complicate the narrative, as every bout of jealousy 'contains an element of fascination with the insolent rival'.⁴⁴ These passions, according to Stendhal, are the quintessential 'modern emotions', the traces of 'the centrifugal movement of an ego powerless to desire by itself'.⁴⁵ 'Vanity, copy, imitation' become the 'key-words' to describe all manifestations of desire, because the very notion of mediation calls into question the possibility of an originary desire existing somewhere in an individual or collective past.⁴⁶ Girard writes that

recapturing the past is recapturing the original impression beneath the opinion of others which hides it; it is to recognize that this opinion is not one's own. It is to understand that the process of mediation creates a very vivid impression of autonomy and spontaneity precisely when we are no longer autonomous and spontaneous.⁴⁷

The story that fills the domestic space of *Caravaggio* is just this tale of triangulated desire, of a craving that, far from autonomous, is always subordinated to ubiquitous, insistent and socially constructed rivalries between lovers. But because rivalry is always a social phenomenon, because the 'mediator' always situates triangulated desire in a context of social struggle, Girard's theory remains rooted in history despite its simultaneous allusion to basic psychological forces. Emotions can be 'modern', he suggests, and are always subject to manipulation and transformation over time.

Caravaggio attempts to situate this triangular desire in a specific social and economic context, as its first instance literally revolves around money: Lena, Caravaggio and Ranuccio stand around and gawk at the winnings the last earned for his victory in the boxing match. Subsequent rivalries also result from concerns with money, prestige and power, as when Caravaggio asserts his economic power over Ranuccio, sparking an explicit debate about the financial aspects of desire. After the first session of Ranuccio posing for *The Martyrdom of St Matthew*, Lena accuses him of falling in love with the artist; 'I'm in love with his money'. Ranuccio responds. After she becomes the mistress of Scipione Borghese, nephew to the Pope, Lena taunts Ranuccio with the prospect that her children will be 'rich beyond avarice'. Ranuccio then responds with the film's first murder, and

⁴⁸ Murray's essay on the film outlines the possible ramifications of these violent actions. See Murray, *Like a Film*, pp. 134–42.

⁴⁹ Lynn Tillman, 'Love story', *Art in America*, vol. 75, no. 1 (1987), p. 23.

Caravaggio in turn kills Ranuccio. Much commentary on the film attempts to reconstruct the motivations for, and theoretical ramifications of, this sequence of violent actions, because this chain of murders, incited by ultimately failed transactions of desire and money, hints at a tragic aftermath for the homosexual desire figured in the film and for the woman posited as a useful but expendable handmaiden to desire. Lena's brutal death and aestheticized burial underscore her status first as a token of exchange used to up the ante of desire between the two men, and then as an ornament, celebrated only after death has rendered her a pliant aesthetic object rather than a defiant subject.⁴⁸ But the film also posits a proximate cause of the resort to murder of friends and lovers: a resented mediation and a commodified desire that reduce all relationships to inferior copies of an imagined ideal, and therefore a sense of alienation permeating the most intimate levels of human interaction. *Caravaggio* displaces questions of what constitutes an essential homosexual or heterosexual desire because such inquiries often revolve around an imagined paragon of desire, relegating each particular manifestation to the status of mere copy. Instead the film asserts that all desire is a copy constituted through imitation, and it celebrates the possibilities of a desire imagined as a copy rather than an essence: desire would then consist of an absolute openness in a network of relationality rather than the futile pursuit of an illusory original. The tragedies in *Caravaggio* are produced not by a failure to achieve the standards of an imagined and idealized model, but by the political and economic strictures that tangle that web of relations and foreclose the movements of desire. Lynne Tillman argues that Caravaggio's murder of Ranuccio proclaims his refusal to 'love over this dead woman's body';⁴⁹ and more generally this violence marks the momentarily deferred struggle for a desire founded on openness rather than erasure. The 'ego powerless to desire by itself', an always inadequately realized copy of an illusory essence, is displaced by 'the centrifugal movement of an ego', the endlessly overlapping and replicating figures of triangular desire. The aspiration towards an original and ideal subjectivity is replaced by an accumulation of manners.

If triangular desire underlies the basic editing pattern, and if each vertex of the triangle expresses its own brand of mediated desire, what do we make of scenes where this triangulation also includes a painting? What purpose does the canvas serve in this ongoing narrative of mediated desire? Does the painting reflect or transform, imitate or resuscitate, the desire that it purports to reproduce? The most remarkable instance of this action is the three-minute sequence of shots when Caravaggio has finished (or is just finishing) his painting of Victorious Cupid, also called *Amor Vincit Omnia* or *Profane Love* (figure 2). The painting becomes an important presence in this succession of gazes (figures 3–5). With no dialogue, the scene consists largely of an exchange of glances between Pipo, Caravaggio and the picture's wide-eyed, Dionysian boy-angel, who seems almost to beg for

Figure 2



⁵⁰ Jarman's screenplay details the production problems associated with this scene, as no casting agencies would allow child actors to play the part of Cupid in a tableau vivant based on Caravaggio's painting. Ultimately, a fully-clothed Dawn Archibald assumed the role of Cupid, emphasizing the disparity rather than identity between model and finished painting. See Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Caravaggio*, p. 75.

⁵¹ Marc Vernet, 'Irrepressible gaze', *Iris*, nos. 14–15 (1992), p. 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 14.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

equal participation in this interchange of desire.⁵⁰ Writing of the painted portrait in cinema, Marc Vernet argues that the picture's

impermeable permanence makes it into a representation of the Ideal, of its imposing mystery, of its inexhaustible secret. The portrait would thus serve to represent that which, once approached, can never be left behind. It comes to signify, iconically, the obsession of desire, the obsession of duty. The character's mouth is always closed, participating in a mute order, yet always with open eyes, to play the role of a sentinel waiting close-mouthed for the answer to a question.⁵¹

With no answer forthcoming, the picture ultimately becomes a figure for the 'unattainable'.⁵² But the triangular interchange of glances between the artist, the tableau vivant and the painting complicates this formula, as the film alternates among the scanning eyes of the artist and tableau and the equally dynamic gaze inscribed on canvas. From the perspective of the artist, lying in a state of almost post-coital relaxation, the painting could serve as a model for one narrative of Caravaggio's life: it bespeaks a narrative of cupidity and Bacchanalian excess, one in keeping with the known facts of his biography. Earlier in the film, Caravaggio's voiceover admits as much, as he says, 'I painted myself as Bacchus and took on his fate'; and in a pun on the role-playing implied in human 'character', he adds, 'man's character is his fate'. But because it partakes in this triangular drama of the studio, and because it introduces a discrepancy between the completed picture and a profilmic reality, the scene also invites other readings. It invites a comparison, first of all, with the model whose likeness it is supposed to reflect but by design does not. It therefore reveals the artifice of the studio, the process by which a woman with propped-up wings becomes,

53 Dominique Paini: 'A detour for the gaze', *Ins*, nos 14–15 (1992), p. 5

54 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 3

55 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 190

56 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 7

57 *Ibid.*, p. 158

58 See Martin Baum Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr (eds), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York, NY: NAL Books, 1989)

through an act of transformative gender performance, Cupid materialized in paint. But the camera also transfigures the subject of the painting, fragmenting it, destroying the imaginary wholeness provided in a museum context. By virtue of the closeup on its eerily active eyes, the painting becomes more than a 'detour for the gaze' that the painted portrait in cinema normally invites;⁵³ instead, in a quixotic and utopian gesture, this lingering closeup imagines a face that usurps the power of the gaze, and a mouth with the power to speak. Roland Barthes writes at the beginning of *Camera Lucida* that he happened upon a photograph of Napoleon's younger brother, 'and I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: "I am looking at the eyes that looked at the emperor"'.⁵⁴ Lingering on the eyes of the angel, alternating between that gaze and the personal drama performed in the studio, the film suggests that Caravaggio's paintings offer a similar connection to an artist who predates the advent of photography: these eyes bring us as near to the artist as posterity, endowed only with the power of retrospection, can see.

But as Benjamin writes in his essay on Baudelaire, 'The deeper the remoteness which a glance has to overcome, the stronger will be the spell that is apt to emanate from the gaze'.⁵⁵ Despite a distance of centuries between the artist and the present-day spectator, and despite the objectified presence of the painted subject, Caravaggio's paintings remain haunted by a gaze. And like the ghostly presence in Derrida's reading of *Hamlet*,

this spectral *someone other looks at us*, we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony, even before and beyond any look on our part, according to an absolute anteriority (which may be on the order of a generation, of more than one generation) and asymmetry, according to an absolutely unmasterable disproportion.⁵⁶

People 'inhabit' what they produce in a manner akin to haunting, writes Derrida, and the process of haunting becomes a form of personification.⁵⁷ By returning to the moment of inscription, when the canvas is not yet (or just) finished, the scene also evokes an earlier and qualitatively different phase in the social life of art objects.

Caravaggio's Profane Love, like the other canvases recreated on screen, fans out the elided moment between the inception of the painting and its release into a commercial sphere, inserting that moment into the precipitate narrative of the artist's life. In these moments the tableau vivant becomes a force of expansion as well as suspension; more than merely holding narrative in abeyance, the tableau engages with the possibilities hidden on the canvases, invisible in public records, and therefore 'hidden from history'.⁵⁸ Like Caravaggio's hidden self-portraits, this painting invites the beholder to take the place of the artist who produced it and, within the larger studio and social contexts provided throughout the film, to imagine the communities in which he moved, to uncover his various objects of

59 For Jarman's discussion of Caravaggio's transformation into 'the most homosexual of painters', despite a relentlessly 'hostile environment', see Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, pp. 271–4.

desire and the proscriptions against that desire. Jarman's comments on the film frame the project in the dual contexts of queer historiography and contemporary queer political mobilization, linking each to the other.⁵⁹ And this archaeology of the artist's identity, this almost desperate search for the submerged story of Caravaggio's sexuality establishes these early modern models of resistance as a contribution to contemporary oppositional politics. If unmediated desire occupies an unattainable position with the advent of the modern era, Profane Love represents the survival of desire in the systems of simulated, bought, and sold desire. With Cupid balancing acrobatically over the musical instruments, books and building materials scattered at his feet – the detritus of a culture playfully subverted – the painting presents its 'victorious' subject as a transcendent figure. Jarman's film ascribes that power of transcendence to the scene enacted before the canvas, to the gender performance and playful, boundary-crossing desire cryptically inscribed in paint. This victorious cupid, whose ancient arrows provoke the oldest form of exogenous desire, also inspires Stendahl's 'modern emotions'; but 'vanity, copy, imitation' become indicators of success rather than degeneration.

The painting that forms the still centre of this complex scene is particularly significant in Caravaggio's oeuvre because, as Howard Hibbard points out, 'it most clearly exhibits his confrontation with Michelangelo's achievement, a compound of admiration and almost childish rebellion'.⁶⁰ But 'there may well have been more than rivalry or rebellion moiling in Caravaggio's mind when he created these Michelangelesque images', he suggests.⁶¹ Victorious Cupid recasts the master's idealized male nudes as a more earthy, sexualized figure, thus establishing 'a profound identification ... with a great artist of the past whom Caravaggio must have believed to have been homosexual'.⁶² The same combination of rivalry and identification marks Jarman's relationship with Caravaggio in his film. Jarman's film disrupts and dismembers the paintings included in the film, as it attempts to renovate these now well-known and widely circulated images through a directed tour of the canvas and the uniquely cinematic project used to reveal their submerged autobiography. In the era of cinematic homage, an undertheorized mutation of the simulacrum, *Caravaggio* rejects the currency of cultural capital and resists the temptation to quote without commentary and critique. Yet underlying this rebellion against inherited images runs a strain of profound identification with Caravaggio, particularly with the artist's own attempts to rework the usual subjects, inserting markers of his own sexual identity into canvases targeted for appropriation and into a longer hermeneutic tradition. With a trace of rebellion, Jarman enlists Caravaggio in the paradoxical project of writing a prehistory of contemporary queer resistance. Antonio Negri has argued that the problem of social change is 'to think the new in the total absence of its conditions'.⁶³ Political modernism, like previous manifestations of the avant garde,

60 Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, p. 155.

61 Ibid., p. 159.

62 Ibid.

63 Antonio Negri, 'Notes on the evolution of the thought of the later Althusser', in Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio (eds.), *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), p. 54.

encountered a similar problem even as it preached the value of a break with ideologies of the past. Jarman's film returns to Caravaggio's work with the hope of finding the new buried somewhere in the past, or, more precisely, because traces of the past exist on the canvases themselves, hidden in plain sight.

Girard's model of triangular desire is useful again because his foundational work on internal mediation, the mediation of a literary master or model, has also inspired later work on the status of art in a condition of belatedness. Girard begins with an extended quotation from *Don Quixote*, from a passage where the would-be knight errant, using the analogy of literary and artistic models, explains to Sancho how to venture closest to perfection in their vocation:

I think ... that, when a painter wants to become famous for his art he tries to imitate the originals of the best masters he knows; the same rule applies to the most important jobs or exercises which contribute to the embellishment of republics. ... In the same way Amadis was the pole, the star, the sun for brave and amorous knights, and we others who fight under the banner of love and chivalry should imitate him. Thus, my friend Sancho, I reckon that whoever imitates him best will come closest to perfect chivalry.⁶⁴

The paradox underlying Jarman's art of imitation is that it both foregrounds its artifice and its inadequacy as reproduction through a parade of excessive images, and situates these ultra-contemporary interventions within an expansive history of artifice. This duality of orientation begins with an ostentatious rejection of classical Hollywood cinema and its illusions, a refusal of mimetic mythology most evident in *Caravaggio*'s anachronistic props – a calculator, typewriter, scooter, and tractor, along with nouvelle cuisine and immediately dated 1980s clothing – that identify *Caravaggio*'s baroque era as a historically and logically impossible one and therefore a self-conscious construction rather than an organic reproduction or mirror of reality. The film exists within a temporal dimension closer to Jean-Luc Nancy's 'unbound time' than to the chronologies of conventional history.⁶⁵ In Jarman's filmmaking this anachronism is intimately intertwined with an overarching political project: the development of oppositional communities and filmmaking practices in a Thatcherite moment when the manipulation of a national past and its histories and images remains an integral strategy in a conservative ideological programme.⁶⁶ Much of Jarman's oeuvre – from *Jubilee* (1977) to *The Last of England* (1987), from *The Tempest* (1979) to *Edward II* (1991) – can be read as an attempt to destabilize that burgeoning and exclusionary identity by overwriting Britain's cultural institutions with both estranging, graffiti-like visual excess and an untimely history that puts the lie to dominant constructions of that national past. Strategies of distancing coexist

64 Quoted in Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 1

65 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 142

66 See Andrew Higson, 'Representing the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started*

with attempts to establish alternative forms of identification. *Caravaggio*'s moments of estrangement are at the same time markers of an alternative history of both Caravaggio's time and Jarman's. The film's obtrusive and anachronistic but oddly familiar props can also be seen as an attempt at a signature, as an attempt to solidify the film's connection to Jarman's own time and place, as a more playful alternative to the flesh and blood that his Caravaggio incorporates into the canvas. Camp acting plays a similar role in the film, as minor players often perform in hyperbolic fashion, both destroying the film's illusionism and establishing a link between Jarman's time and Caravaggio's: the film's repeated, knowing, sexualized glances mirror those of Caravaggio's camped-up Cupid in *Profane Love*, and beckon towards the trail of gay shibboleths in both Jarman and Caravaggio.⁶⁷ The distancing strategies of political modernism have become at the same time strategies to spark identification, particularly among a queer subculture of viewers.

Other Jarman films betray more ambivalence about his own influences because even those who fought against their times can succumb to the potentially more powerful force of nostalgia. Graffiti scrawled during the Paris uprisings of 1968 declared 'art is dead, don't eat its corpse', an admonition to steer clear of a rotting heritage, but also, as Benjamin might have added, an exhortation to preserve evidence that might later prove the best witness to its own demise.⁶⁸ Jarman's ambivalence emerges most provocatively in the opening moments of *The Last Of England*, when Spring, a young squatter living amidst piles of rubble in a landscape at once postapocalyptic and postindustrial, first tramples on, then simulates sex with, Caravaggio's *Profane Love*. As Benjamin writes, 'visions of the frenzy of destruction, in which all earthly things collapse into a heap of ruins ... reveal the limit set upon allegorical contemplation, rather than its ideal quality'.⁶⁹ *The Last of England* bristles at the restrictions of Caravaggio's allegories, its confinement to a world of corpses and contemplation of desire in the abstract. Jarman's millennial film, riddled with haunting images of power violently exerted and victims huddled together in their powerlessness, posits Spring's resistance as a double-edged sword: while rebelling against the power structures that seemingly everywhere oppress, he also destroys records of earlier acts of resistance, relegating Caravaggio's attempt to rework and transcend the culture scattered at Cupid's feet to just another piece of rubble. Spring's desperate, purely sexual advances towards the artwork reflect a poverty of critical tools at his disposal: his only means of accessing the image are the either/or of indiscriminate destruction or of rapt fascination with the image. But *Caravaggio*'s tableaux return these to the archive of images through an act of critical reincorporation. The film alludes to, but transforms, the Death of Marat, Jacques-Louis David's painting of the revolutionary who died while penning a political tract in his bathtub.⁷⁰ In the film the Jacobin becomes a rival

⁶⁷ See, for example, Von Lates, 'Caravaggio's peaches and academic puns'.

⁶⁸ Angelo Quattrocchi and Tom Nairn, *The Beginning of the End: France, May 1968 What Happened, Why It Happened* (London: Panther, 1968), p. 39.

⁶⁹ Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, p. 232.

⁷⁰ In his screenplay for *Caravaggio*, Jarman criticizes David for reintroducing a 'scientific' element to painting, thereby reducing the image to the grids imposed upon it. See Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Caravaggio*, p. 45.

painter and hostile critic searching for the most acerbic phrases to attack Caravaggio, just as David's neoclassicism is founded upon an implicit critique and abandonment of Caravaggio, an abject figure for his anti-Albertian construction of space and his search for a contemporary idiom to renovate and transmit biblical tales. The tableau with Cardinal Del Monte as Caravaggio's St Jerome Writing becomes a knowing wink at the subject's inadequacy in such an exalted role, his corruption clashing with the stores of wisdom scattered on his desk. These two quotations seem anomalous in the film because they contrast dramatically with the seriousness of the studio reanimations of other Caravaggio masterpieces. They allude to famous tableaux as vehicles for trivial commentaries on trivial characters. Flat and still, these images are the filmic equivalents of the glossy magazine that Baglione carries around to demonstrate the limitations of Caravaggio's work to anyone willing to look. Divorced from the moment of their production, these quotations advertise their status as vacuous simulacra, as consumable and disposable objects devoid of the context present elsewhere, in the tableaux that provide evidence of the artist's production process and the craftsmanship it entails.

Rather than peddle Caravaggio's pictures in a display of cultural capital, the film foregrounds the superficiality of uncritical homage and quotation, emphasizing their complicity in systems of commodification. Its tableaux vivants instead represent an act of critical hermeneutics; they exist not merely for the sake of allusion, but as part of a renovation of the image through a uniquely cinematic project. If a canvas with 'I, Michelangelo, did this' sparked the filmmaker's interest in the project, *Caravaggio* emphasizes the verb as well as the subject, positing the act of making as an integral part of the personality embodied in the film. Shown as works in progress, within the studio, the tableaux transform their original canvases into protocinematic devices used to record gestures, motion, labour, even the duration of their own creation. Jarman rereads Caravaggio's paintings as early avatars of Deleuze's opsigns and chronosigns. They not only, as Stella says, 'telescope art history',⁷¹ they also represent a struggle against the temporal and spatial constraints of the medium. The film becomes a search for the palimpsest implied in the layering process of painting, the process Henri-Georges Clouzot reveals in *Le Mystère Picasso/The Picasso Mystery* (1956), an earlier attempt to capture on film the elusive method of an artist. Centring on the production of the artwork, *Caravaggio* also provides a tentative answer to W.J.T. Mitchell's vexing and ultimately unanswerable question about the nature of pictorial 'language' and 'desire': 'What do pictures really want?', he asks.⁷² The cumulative subject of Jarman's film is the mass of information that the paintings themselves cannot tell: the story, at once economic and formal and biographical, of their own production. The film presents the unrepresentable history of the moment of production, of the spaces, stories and desires elided in the conventional life of the

71 Stella, 'Caravaggio' p. 39

72 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 71–82

artist or even on the surface of the canvases themselves. Perhaps pictorial desire is not unlike human desire in this respect; perhaps pictures, too, hope most of all to reveal their lost histories, what they have witnessed, what is beneath the surface; but are forced to do so only with the surfaces that become their interface with the world and crystallize into a world in themselves. The tableau vivant reconstructs those static surfaces, transforming the stability of being into a process of becoming. They exist in what Deleuze calls the pure form of time, the infinitive form of the event, a synthesis of virtual past and virtual future that combines what has already happened and what will happen.⁷³

The film ends by returning to the closeup of Caravaggio's face that opened the film, with the artist reduced to the status of corpse and the earlier carnivalesque atmosphere dampened into mourning. Yet as Benjamin writes of the atmosphere of mourning and the omnipresent corpses around which the *Trauerspiel* revolves, these dead bodies expire, then linger on stage because

the allegorization of the physis can only be carried through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse. And the characters of the *Trauerspiel* die, because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory. It is not for the sake of immortality that they meet their end, but for the sake of the corpse. . . . The corpse becomes quite simply the pre-eminent emblematic property. . . . The apotheoses are barely conceivable without it'.⁷⁴

The lifeless body of Caravaggio bookends the film because that corpse embodies precisely what is absent from images and from histories based on texts and pictures. The film presents a biography of Caravaggio, but not one based on his police records or his patronage but his body. The self-portraits inscribed by Caravaggio onto canvas continue to haunt the paintings because they gesture towards a record of the body otherwise inaccessible to history. These spectral bodies are the object of *Caravaggio's* hauntology. The film's final corpse becomes the crux of an allegory for the film's historical project because, while it mirrors the body of Caravaggio, it also marks the failure of representation necessarily devoid of the desires that constitute the body. In the published version of *The Last of England*, Jarman describes the acts of filmmaking and viewing as akin to archaeology:

My world is in fragments, smashed in pieces so fine I doubt I will ever reassemble them. So I scramble in the rubbish, an archaeologist who stumbles across a buried film. An archaeologist who projects his own private world along a beam of light into the arena, till all goes dark at the end of the performance, and we go home. . . . An artist is engaged in a dig.⁷⁵

That digging takes place on a small scale, in intimate sites. Jarman's film recasts Caravaggio as a precursor in that project, as an artist who

⁷³ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 86–91.

⁷⁴ Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 217–9.

⁷⁵ Derek Jarman, *The Last of England*, ed. David L. Hirst (London: Constable, 1987).

counters the eventual appropriation of his canvases by inscribing indelibly upon them both self-portraits and group portraits of friends, transforming monumental artworks into artefacts of his immediate personal, domestic and social surroundings. The reconstructive process in *Caravaggio* becomes a search for those lost desires and ultimately unrecoverable bodies, and the excavation wills them into being precisely as an object of inquiry. Jarman enlists Caravaggio as a model of an artist who likewise constructed within grand biblical and historical narratives, within his own enveloping economic context – in short, within the dominant discourses of his society – a small space where a cohort of artists and friends could together contribute to a covert history of desire. In his 'Introduction' to the second volume of the *Realms of Memory* series, Pierre Nora defines 'tradition' as 'memory that has become historically aware of itself'.⁷⁶ Jarman constructs the past in a different manner: the tradition invoked in *Caravaggio* is memory that has become aware of the difference in itself.

Near the beginning of the film, Jerusaleme picks up the shield bearing Caravaggio's Medusa, stares into its petrifying gaze, then prances around the studio, flashing the Medusa at the artist. Caravaggio then scoops up the boy, looks into the face of Medusa and laughs. This exchange of glances with Medusa exemplifies a strategy used throughout the film, as the artist returns to an emblem from the past, a mixture of abjection and the mythology deployed to contain it, and discovers difference that might otherwise have remained obscure. Nietzsche famously likened his concept of eternal return to the head of Medusa, venturing in his notebooks that 'the great thought' also resembled a 'Head of Medusa: all the world's features petrify, a congealed death-throe'.⁷⁷ Yet, as Derrida points out, Nietzsche's proposed hymn to Medusa also recognizes the laughter and sense of injustice with which she accepts her banishment. The identification with the abjection of Medusa appears as early as antiquity; and from the defiant, aggrieved Medusa of Shelley⁷⁸ to the laughing, almost joyful version of Hélène Cixous,⁷⁹ the countenance of Medusa has represented both abjection solidified through myth and the possibility of a jubilant escape from myth. What simultaneously frightens and attracts in the engagement with Medusa is immobility itself and its escape from the repetitions of myth. The tableau vivant also operates through a kind of Medusa effect, feigning immobility in order to avoid the eternal repetition of the same. To see Medusa through the lens of myth crystallizes the viewer into a pattern of eternal return; but in that instant of paralysis the repetition of myth also ceases, if only momentarily. To see the tableau through the lens of heritage merely reiterates that heritage with all its limitations; but within its moment of uncanny immobility other possibilities emerge. Daryl Hine captures the possibilities of Medusa and myth in his poem *Tableau Vivant*:

76 Pierre Nora, 'Introduction', *Realms of Memory: the Construction of the French Past*, volume II, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. ix.

77 Quoted in David Farrell Krell, *Postponements: Women, Sensuality and Death in Nietzsche* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 69.

78 Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci'. A hypertext edition of this poem edited by Neil Fraistat and Melissa Ju Sites can be found at URL: <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/medcover.html> [4 August 2003].

79 See Hélène Cixous, *La Risa de la Medusa* (Barcelona: Dirección General de la Mujer, 2001).

Perseus on an ornamental charger,
 German work, sixteenth century,
 Hovering above the slumbering Medusa
 Like a buzzing fly or a mosquito
 On beaten, golden wings. His head averted
 From her agate gaze. In his right hand
 A sword, in his left a mirror.

Helmeted by night, slipshod by darkness.
 Wondering where to strike. She looks asleep
 As if dreaming of petrified forests,
 Monumental dryads, stone leaves, stone limbs,
 Or of the mate that she will never meet
 Who will look into her eyes and live.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Daryl Hine, *Minutes* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1968), p. 45.

⁸¹ Jermonie J. McGann, 'The beauty of the Medusa: a study in romantic literary iconology', *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1972), p. 24.

⁸² Quoted in T. J. Clark, 'Origins of the present crisis', *New Left Review*, no. 2 (March–April 2000), p. 91.

Jerome McGann argues that 'this poem is, among other things, a brief allegory about what has happened to western art between the sixteenth century and our own day', with Shelley's invented lover for Medusa the harbinger of a monumental change in thinking about Medusa, and Hine's poem 'as far from Shelley as Shelley is from the sixteenth century'.⁸¹ What distinguishes these lines is a fascination with the moment just before Perseus slays Medusa, as the poet deviates from a narrative of heroic action and focuses instead on the vacillation that precedes it. The moment of hesitation becomes a flash of possibility. The poem's title, *Tableau Vivant*, underscores the connection between the momentarily immobilized tableau and this indecision before the act that forever cements Medusa's place in myth. The purpose of modern art, writes Adorno, is to 'teach the petrified forms how to dance by singing them their own song'; but modernity veils those paralyzed forms behind an illusion of movement and innovation. The tableau vivant stills bodies to display that stupefaction, and then to petrify the viewer, allowing for the return of difference, leading to 'a discovery of the joints and sutures in the stone. So that the statues – the forms, the fetishes – do finally creak into motion'.⁸² The past turned to stone, the tableau vivant in Jarman's *Caravaggio* also echoes with haunting voices, with the songs of those momentarily stilled bodies who have gazed at Medusa and lived.

Good times in race relations? CBS's *Good Times* and the legacy of civil rights in 1970s prime-time television

ANIKO BODROGHKOZY

On 1 February 1974, a new black situation comedy joined CBS's prime-time line-up. *Good Times* (tx 1974–79) was not the first television series to portray an African-American family. It was not even the first series set in the poverty-stricken American inner city. It was, however, the first attempt to represent a black family with the father present. Springing from producer Norman Lear's hugely successful stable of mid 1970s hits and spin-offs, *Good Times* shared with its prime-time siblings *All in the Family* (CBS, tx 1971–79) and *Maude* (CBS, tx 1972–78) a concern with socially relevant subject matter that transcended traditional sitcom fare. Because of its approach to questions of representation and its attempt to address social and political issues related to black poverty and racism, *Good Times* quickly developed into an important site of contestation and struggle over questions of 'blackness', the black family, 'authenticity', and black-versus-white control in the immediate aftermath of the civil rights movement. Was *Good Times* a victory for African-Americans in the struggle for 'positive images' or was it a particularly galling defeat – or both? What did it mean for post-civil rights race politics that the series provided viewers with the first black family with a strong male patriarch? What did it mean that they were poor and that the Chicago projects setting was an important aspect of the production? This essay will examine the frequently heated and very public debates about the image politics of *Good Times* as they circulated in both the mainstream press and the African-American press, as well as how fans of the show

participated in these debates. I shall also examine the textual mechanisms employed by the show, exploring the particular uses of popular polysemy in the show's strategy to pursue divisive or difficult subject matter, yet also to undercut that material. In order to understand how and why *Good Times* operated as it did, we need to see the series in dialogue with a long history of concerns about African-American representations on US television, especially in the wake of the civil rights movement. We need to resituate the show in its production and reception context. We also need to interrogate the trope of 'authenticity' that bedeviled this example of media culture as it did most representations of blackness in the wake of the black freedom movements of the 1960s.

As a comedy and as an example of media culture reaching a diverse audience, the show worked gingerly to negotiate its representations in order to circulate empowering messages about African-Americans while not unduly discomforting more conservative white viewers. In the following section, I shall explore in depth one particular episode that provides an instructive example of both the possibilities of prime-time programming as a venue for pursuing genuinely progressive racial politics, as well as the inevitable limitations on popular culture providing anything but the most compromised and defused images of such politics.

'Bussing ain't nothing but a bunch of honky four-wheel jive': negotiating the bussing crisis in prime time

On 12 September 1974, the first day of school for the Boston public school system, yellow buses rolled out from the black ghetto, Roxbury, ferrying poor black students to white, working-class South Boston in order to integrate the stubbornly segregated schools of the 'cradle of liberty'. According to the court order handed down over the summer, students, both black and white, were to be forcibly bussed all over the city in order to comply with the now twenty-year-old *Brown v. Topeka* Board of Education Supreme Court ruling mandating school integration 'with all deliberate speed'. As one bus drove to 'Southie's' previously all-white high school, the twenty black riders were greeted with signs reading 'Niggers Go Home', then with thrown bottles, and with young whites yelling, 'Die, niggers, die!' Masses of police had to intervene to protect the schoolchildren. Thus began the violent and ugly Boston bussing crisis.¹

Three weeks later on 1 October, *Good Times*, into its second season and a top-ten-rated series, just happened to have ten-year-old Michael Evans, the academically talented and politically militant youngest son of the Evans family, grapple with the bussing dilemma.² The timing was probably coincidental, the final draft script having been written in July.³ School desegregation in the north was increasingly a focal point of civil rights attention, but certainly the producers of *Good Times*

1 George R. Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston: the History of School Desegregation* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 206.

2 *Good Times* yearly Nielsen ranking for September 1974–75 was seventh, with a 25.8 share of audiences. See Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows 1946–Present* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1981), p. 929.

3 See Allan Manings Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, final draft script, 'Crosstown Buses Run All Day', by John Baskin and Roger Shulman, dated 24 July 1974, Box 6.

could not have imagined that their episode would coincide with news imagery of yellow school buses surrounded by hordes of angry whites. Wittingly or not, the show found itself in direct dialogue with a raging, anguished, convulsive crisis in urban, northern American race relations at the close of the civil rights era.

After establishing that the schools in the Evans family's ghetto neighbourhood are the worst in the city: 'Our hardest math problem was how to divide forty students into twenty books', Michael is given the opportunity to be *voluntarily* bussed to one of the city's best schools in an upscale white area (figure 1). The narrative emphasizes a number of times that this particular bussing scheme is not forced. In the controversy that convulsed Boston, as well as other school districts, the mandatory aspect of the situation served as one of the key flashpoints of anger for whites. The bussing controversy also revealed the limits of white Americans' (especially northern white Americans') tolerance for desegregation. In arenas of casual contact like restaurants and waiting rooms, integration was acceptable, but in more intimate surroundings such as housing and schooling the situation was quite different. As John Lewis, former head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the most important organizations of the civil rights movement, observed in 1974: 'When it got to hard things, and when the problem started to touch the north, the whites turned around'.⁴ By emphasizing the voluntary nature of bussing, the *Good Times* episode skirts the more painful dilemma of the need for mandatory programmes to counter deeply entrenched patterns of racial segregation – whether in the south or the north. White viewers watching the episode would be more likely to feel good about their racial magnanimity if they could imagine themselves voluntarily

4 Quoted in Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: the Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), p. 110.

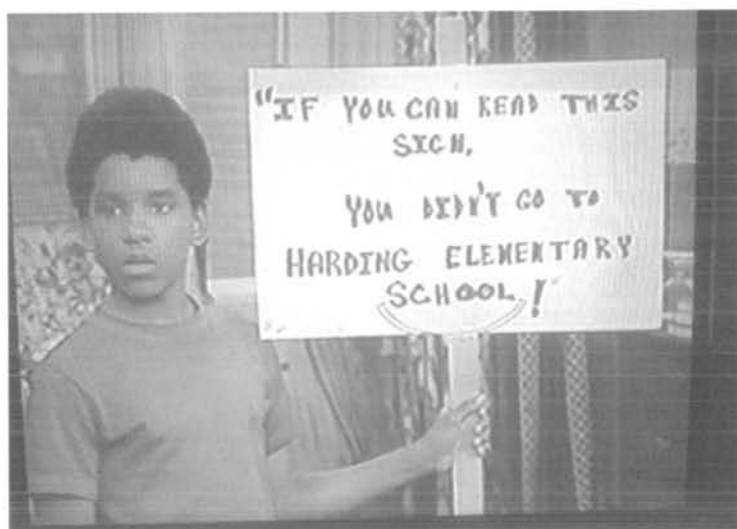


Figure 1

welcoming little Michael into their schools rather than having Michael thrust upon them.

Although the vast majority of opposition to bussing came from whites, in the episode it is Michael who speaks out against bussing. If it is a voluntary programme – he does not volunteer! This strategy also neatly deflects attention away from the implications of white communities' opposition to bussing and what that suggests about the possibilities of true integration in the urban north in 1974. The episode defuses that particular theme in an almost over-determined way, by insisting on Michael's refusal to go along with the programme. From the series' first episode, Michael was established as the family's 'militant midget', mouthing Black Power sentiments that might be too threatening coming from an adult male character. Michael pens slogans such as 'Bussing ain't nothing but a bunch of honky four-wheel jive' and 'Black ain't beautiful on a yellow bus', which are played out solely for laughs rather than serving as serious afrocentric critiques of school integration (figure 2).

Nevertheless, despite these strategies to temper and lighten the threat associated with portraying the bussing controversy, the episode, in a number of scenes played in a more serious tone, grapples forthrightly with the need for bussing. In one scene, Michael and parents Florida and James argue the politics of bussing. The scene is noteworthy for the absence of JJ, the skinny, rubber-faced, clownish teen who typically functioned to goose up the laughs and divert attention from more thought-provoking themes. As I shall show, the phenomenal popularity of this character served as a major flashpoint of controversy over the politics of 'good role models' and 'authenticity'. With JJ absent, the scene provides viewers with a few minutes to reflect meaningfully



Figure 2

about the issue and its social context, with only a minimum of humour that arises directly from the situation. Standing between Florida and James, who tell him it would be a shame to waste his talent in a bad school, Michael, asserting a Black Power stance, proclaims, 'If God gave me talent, it was meant to be used in my own neighbourhood with my own people!' He goes on to assert, 'Mama, bussing is just a way of buying us off', and to ask James why he supports bussing (figure 3).

Michael: You were never bussed.

James: Yes, I was, too. When I was a kid in Mississippi, I was bussed – by foot. Passed three beautiful white schools to one crummy black one.

James's dialogue here is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, throughout the series James's lack of education (he never went beyond the sixth grade) is made narratively significant. Always striving to find better work to raise his family out of poverty, James is often shown to be crippled by his lack of education. His dialogue here links his lack of opportunity to the history of Jim Crow schooling and contextualizes bussing to this history. His words are also significant in that they indict white power and privilege. Throughout the episode characters point to racism and white power as oppressive agents against which they must struggle. The school district to which Michael will be bussed is nicknamed the 'detergent district' by Florida, who quips, 'Everything there is whiter than white'. Responding to sister Thelma's comment that she's never heard of any racial trouble there, JJ responds, 'That's 'cause they ain't got no racials there. Only colour problem they have there is matching the carpet to the drapes.' The most significant indictment of white racism, however, is again given to James, whose stance throughout the show is privileged and typically provides viewers



Figure 3

5 See Aniko Bodroghkozy, "Is this what you mean by color TV?" race, gender, and contested meanings in NBC's *Julia*, in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (eds), *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consume* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 143–67.

6 In a scholarly article written about *Good Times* during its first year, Eugenia Collier contrasts *Good Times* with *Sanford and Son*, and argues that the latter gives no indication that the difficulties of the black characters have anything to do with racism or white power. In *Good Times*, however, 'the characters constantly do battle the struggle against oppression, which is so deeply human and so indigenous to black art, is never totally absent [from *Good Times*]' See "'Black' shows for white viewers", *Freedomways: a Quarterly Review of the Freedom Movement*, vol. 14 no. 3 (1974), p. 214.

with the preferred reading. In response to Florida's and Thelma's sudden qualms about sending Michael so far away from home and separating him from his friends, James explodes: 'Y'all talking just like white people do about bussing. The only reason they talk that way is to cover up for the fact that they don't want to go to school with us.' Throughout this episode and numerous episodes throughout the run of the series, white people and white power are the Other against which the Evans family struggles. But unlike the case in previous black-oriented television series, such as *Julia* (NBC, tx. 1968–71), this white Other is not merely a misguided, prejudiced individual;⁵ in *Good Times* the Other is the white power structure.⁶

Inevitably, the show had to temper this material with straight comedy. While the bussing issue was the show's major theme, a significant proportion of its twenty-two minutes of screen time focused on matters that had nothing to do with material that was potentially uncomfortable for white viewers. In order to defuse the more serious subject matter, the episode sprinkled in generous helpings of JJ and Thelma each joking about how ugly and dumb the other was. But mostly the episode served up JJ doing comic routines and prancing about in red longjohns (figure 4). Viewers disinclined to grapple with the real-world issues of bussing never had to wait long for the episode to fall back on more familiar black comedy forms.

As we can see from this analysis of one early episode of *Good Times*, the series negotiated a minefield of dilemmas in dealing with racial politics, socially engaged subject matter versus traditional sitcom fare, and the problem of black representation. This latter is inextricably connected with a concern over 'authenticity', and the question of



Figure 4

'authentic' black representation has historically been a central theme in popular discourse about the portrayal of blacks on US television. From fully assimilated 'white Negroes' of the 1960s like Bill Cosby in *I Spy* (NBC, tx 1965–68) to Diahann Carroll in *Julia*, through 1970s ghetto blacks in *Sanford and Son* (NBC, tx 1972–77) and *What's Happening!!* (ABC, tx 1976–79), to 1970s and 1980s upper-crust black professionals in *The Jeffersons* (CBS, tx 1975–85) and *The Cosby Show* (NBC, tx 1984–92), popular press critics and audience members have obsessively interrogated the degree to which these images were 'realistic'.

Both Herman Gray and Stuart Hall have questioned this preoccupation with 'authenticity' and the 'realistic'. Gray asserts, 'No longer can our analyses be burdened unnecessarily by the weight of an eternal search for either "authentic" media representations of "blackness" or accurate reflections of African American social and cultural life'.⁷ Hall also problematizes the quest for an authentic black popular culture, arguing that black representations are dialogic and hybridized; black life and experience themselves are imbricated in representation. 'It's in how blacks represent and imagine themselves that they are constituted. "Real life" is not a test against which cultural strategies or texts can be measured.'⁸ Calls for the 'authentic' smack of essentialism and also suggest a unitary and singular approach to blackness. But if black popular culture (if we can speak of such a thing) is a contradictory space, inevitably contaminated by previous representations that are themselves built on representations and are always in dialogue with generations of imagery produced in a racist environment, how can we interrogate more or less useful and empowering representations? Hall suggests a useful way to approach this endeavour:

However deformed, incorporated and inauthentic are the forms in which black people and black communities and traditions appear and are represented in popular culture, we continue to see, in the figure and the repertoire on which popular culture draws, the experience that stands behind them . . . black popular culture has enabled the surfacing, inside the mixed and contradictory modes even of mainstream popular culture, of elements of a discourse that is different . . . other forms of life, other traditions of representations.⁹

Producing 'a discourse that is different'

As a family sitcom, one of network television's most familiar and longstanding genres, *Good Times* provides a useful example of how black experience and traditions are both incorporated by a genre and also change it. The sitcom was the product of two African-Americans, actor Mike Evans, best-known as Lionel Jefferson in Lear's *All in the Family*, and writer Eric Monte. In the show's early publicity, more attention was given to Evans and Monte than to Lear, executive

7 Herman Gray, *Watching Race Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 3

8 Stuart Hall, 'What is this "black" in black popular culture?', in Gina Dent (ed.), *Black Popular Culture: a Project by Michele Wallace* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1992), p. 30

9 *Ibid.* p. 27

10 Bob Lucas, 'A "salt pork and collard greens" TV show', *Ebony*, June 1974, p. 51

11 Ronald E. Kisner, 'New comedy brings good times to TV', *Jet*, 23 May 1974, p. 58–60

12 Harry F. Waters, 'Good apples and bad', *Newsweek*, 25 February 1974, p. 67

13 Eric Monte interview, *The Making of Good Times* (E! Entertainment, 2000)

14 Gray, *Watching Race*, p. 10

producer of the series. *Ebony*, the slick monthly magazine targeted at a middle-class black readership, promoted the two and proclaimed, 'The "soul" in *Good Times* is authentic'.¹⁰ The black weekly *Jet* suggested the importance of Monte's lived experience. He was a 'bonified [sic] ex-hobo, cab driver, dish washer and tenant of Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project. His name is no tip-off to his racial identity. "But you know good and well there's no way a white cat could survive Cabrini-Green", chuckles Monte.'¹¹ *Newsweek* suggested, 'There are many who will see racial stereotyping in "Good Times", but they won't be able to quibble with the ancestry of its creators'.¹²

This discourse of authenticity was in dialogue with discourses of inauthenticity that swirled around the previous (and first) high-profile black family sitcom *Julia*. That series was the well-publicized handiwork of veteran television writer-producer and white liberal, Hal Kanter. If *Julia* was a white man's vision of black family, then *Good Times* was a vision of black family by soul brothers. If *Julia* gave television viewers a fantasy 'white Negro', thoroughly and effortlessly integrated into white middle-class life, then *Good Times* countered by giving viewers a poor family struggling to survive in a largely segregated grimy housing project. Therefore, as the first US television series created by African-Americans, *Good Times* attempted to intervene in the history of black representations in popular culture and present something new, something presumably based on 'reality'.

The most significant way that the show's creators attempted to negotiate black representation was with the figure of James Evans, Sr. During development meetings with Lear's company, Monte was told over and over again to get rid of the father: 'A strong black man is not funny in a sitcom'.¹³ Esther Rolle, for whom the series was created, adamantly refused to do the show if she did not have a strong husband for her character's three children. In the discourse circulated around the show, especially in the black press, this struggle by the show's black talent to insist on the presence of a black father, served as a counter to white hegemonic representations of a black family.

Herman Gray has argued:

Television representations of blackness work largely to legitimate and secure the terms of the dominant cultural and social order by circulating within and remaining structured by them. . . . Just as often, however, there are alternative (and occasional oppositional) moments in American commercial television representations of race, especially in its fragmented and contradictory character. In some cases, television representations of blackness explode and reveal the deeply rooted terms of this hierarchy.¹⁴

In the early 1970s the dominant cultural image of the poor black family was that of a 'black matriarchy'. The term had been coined in the much-publicized 1965 Moynihan Report on the state of the black family. The federal government report argued that a 'tangle of

- 15 Lee Rainwater and William Y. Yancy, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), pp. 5–6. See also Donna L. Franklin, *Ensuring Inequality: the Structural Transformation of the African-American Family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997).

pathologies' was to blame for the deterioration of black families, including overly independent and dominant women, drop-out and delinquent youth, and socially alienated black men who withdrew from family life.¹⁵ Therefore female-headed households in the ghettos were deemed both the cause and the effect of perpetual cycles of poverty. By the early 1970s, this controversial report had become hegemonic common sense in social discourse about the problems of the ghetto, alleviating pressure on policymakers to address a problem that appeared to arise from blacks' own lifestyle choices. Thus in 1970 Daniel Patrick Moynihan, working for the Nixon Administration, advocated a policy of 'benign neglect'. Within this representational context, Monte's and Rolle's demand for a strong black patriarch functioned as a powerful oppositional strategy, and also countered popular cultural images of fatherless black families such as the Bakers in *Julia*.

In this strategy, Monte and Rolle were employing the politics of 'good role models', trying to use popular culture to circulate alternative representations of poor black families (figure 5). But this mobilization of 'good role models' had less to do with social reality and more to do with an oppositional politics of representation. *Julia* gave US viewers an anomalous middle-class family headed by a single (actually widowed) black mother and became a target for criticism by white liberals and many African-American critics. *Good Times* offered an equally anomalous ghetto family with a male as head, an image which won kudos from black and white commentators when the show was first aired, but which soon found itself in tension with governmental and social science discourses suggesting a crisis among black families in the inner cities.

The 1970s saw a huge increase both in black families living in



Figure 5

poverty and black families headed by single mothers as the post-World War II economic boom finally came to an end. Even as civil rights movement victories helped foster a new class of black middle-class professionals, increasing numbers of poorer blacks entered a frightening downward spiral of unemployment and misery. Welfare rolls exploded, but Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) discriminated against families where husbands were present, often forcing black women to become heads of households as few jobs for black men existed in the ghetto. As historian William Chafe has noted, 'For its victims, the social changes of the 1960s meant nothing. Instead, they found themselves more buffeted than ever by the triple whammy of race, class and gender oppression'.¹⁶ By 1972, two-thirds of all black families in poverty were headed by females.¹⁷ So while families like the Evanses did exist in the inner city, their numbers appeared to be diminishing alarmingly quickly, as moral panic focused on female-headed ghetto families.

By the early to mid 1970s, 'culture of poverty', 'feminization of poverty' and 'permanent underclass' functioned as ominous new terms with which to label the urban black phenomenon. These labels were frightening for many whites, such as the working-class ethnics of the Boston bussing controversy. *Good Times* had to negotiate this new post-civil rights terrain that had none of the optimism and hope of 1960s racial politics. While the representation of the black father would have particular political salience for many African-American viewers, for whites an intact sitcom family, rather than being a political statement, may merely have been another in a long line of comfortable, familiar images of the family unit. In significant ways, the Evans family recirculated the notion of the traditional sitcom family where warmth, humour, and good moral lessons prevail, where children are cute and cheeky but ultimately submit to parental wisdom, and where wives are domestic and recognize that Father Knows Best. *Good Times* did not violate any of these conventions. In order to negotiate its 'authentic' representation of black inner-city poverty and the attending white racism, the series had to soften the representation, making it more palatable to white, middle-class viewers by giving them a familiar family image. For African-American commentators, always aware of the disproportionate importance of black media imagery to the cause of black political and social advancement in a racist America, this negotiation was useful: the familiar patriarchal family was novel in the repertoire of black media images and thus played into the 'good role model' approach to black representation.

Good Times emphasized over and over again the importance of the patriarchal family. In an early episode, for instance, sixteen-year-old Thelma is dating a graduate student, Eddie, who has written a thesis entitled 'Sexual behavior in the ghetto'.¹⁸ The unexplained appearance of the report on the Evans family's couch causes consternation for both parents, but especially James who, not having read it, rails about its

16 William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 439

17 Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, p. 111

18 Titled 'Sex and the Evans Family', it aired 15 March 1974

'filth'. When the nerdish-looking twenty-one-year-old presents himself to James and Florida and tells them that he wrote the thesis, James erupts and has to be placated by Florida (figure 6). He gets particularly exercised when Eddie reveals that he interviewed Thelma in his research. The conflict resolves itself when Eddie further explains that Thelma's interview on page twenty-five supported a strong theory he was pursuing:

Eddie: In broken homes with just one parent, there's high percentage of loose attitudes towards sex.

Florida: (Reading from page twenty-five of the report) But in homes with a solid family foundation, especially a strong father figure, the incidence of unwanted pregnancy is almost non-existent.

James: You mean page twenty-five is clean?

Florida: It sure is!

Eddie: And that's all Thelma's interview was about.

Florida: It makes real nice reading, too.

James then asks Florida to repeat the part about the strong father figure. This is followed by a cut to a closeup of James's self-satisfied grin as he listens again to the description of the importance of his strong parenting (figure 7).

The sociopolitical ramifications of this form of representation are contradictory. On the one hand, it emphatically and even didactically presents viewers with the 'good role model'. A successful black family depends on a patriarchal structure, and *Good Times* attempts to model that structure for its presumably impressionable younger black viewers. Impressionable white viewers could also perhaps have some of their



Figure 6

Figure 7



prejudice lessened by seeing an alternative image of black family. On the other hand, this form of representation perpetuates the same discourse circulated by the Moynihan Report. Non-patriarchal families, female-headed families and non-traditional families are abnormal, deviant and inevitably lead to out-of-control sexuality.

Good Times was also noteworthy for the way it portrayed James and Florida's marriage. Along with being strong parents, they were frequently shown as strong romantic and sexual partners. Episodes often featured the two hugging and kissing, with James saying 'Gimme some sugar, baby' (figure 8). Viewers were often reminded that the two enjoyed an active sex life, despite the cramped quarters of their two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment. In one episode with a 'Women's Lib' theme, Florida feels that she is being taken for granted by her family.¹⁹ She confronts James, asking whether he thinks of her merely as someone to sew on his buttons. She asks when the last time was that he made her feel like a woman. With a devilish look in his eye, he replies, 'How 'bout night before last?' In answer to her question of whether he really loves her or whether she's just a habit, James sweeps her back in a big kiss. As she whistles the children in from the bedroom where they've been banished for the scene, Florida, with her own devilish look, says they should give them their dinner – and get rid of them as fast as possible. 'Have mercy', replies James, and orders the kids in ('Move it! Move it! Move it!') with the enthusiasm of a football coach on a winning streak.

Respectful and affirming representations of sexuality between African-Americans, as many critics have pointed out, have historically been rare in US popular culture. *Good Times* broke important ground here, but remained the only television programme to do so until *The*

¹⁹ Titled 'Florida the Woman', it aired 17 February 1976

20 Most of the letters discussed here are collected in the Allan Manings Collection. There are approximately seventy letters dated between February 1974 (when the series first aired) and February 1975. All the letters have replies signed by Mr Manings. I have supplemented these with letters published in *Ebony*. While I do not see these letters as unproblematically representative of the larger *Good Times* audience, I do feel these letters provide clues about historical reception practices and can be valuable in suggesting some of the reception strategies used by viewers. Along with cultural historians of television such as Lynn Spigel, I am employing a 'conjectural method of historical detection' here. For more on this approach, see Carlo Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: clues and scientific method', *History Workshop* no. 9 (Spring 1980), pp. 5–36.



Figure 8

Cosby Show's Claire and Cliff Huxtable a decade later. But even in its portrayal of black sexuality the series was not without its contradictions. Balancing Florida and James's progressive images of sexuality was the clownish portrayal of JJ's sex life. A ludicrous 'ladies man', JJ's sexuality was grotesque, laughable and unbelievable. Preparing for dates, he would prance about the apartment in over-the-top outfits that ridiculed any notion of his attractiveness to the opposite sex. The clownishness of JJ's 'sex appeal' also neatly defused and calmed any underlying fears about black male phallic power. The mostly unseen girlfriends that JJ rhapsodized about were often also represented as grotesques: obese, ugly, stupid.

In attempting to circulate new, progressive and 'educational' representations of African-Americans, *Good Times* constantly had to negotiate the new and progressive with the old, familiar and regressive. Popular polysemy proved particularly tortuous for the show as it tried to navigate its representational minefield.

Viewers respond

Letters written by audience members suggest that in the show's early years issues of representation were highly significant.²⁰ Self-identifying black and white viewers encountering these images of black family, poverty and ghetto life attempted to make sense of them in various ways. As I shall show, both blacks and whites often focused on the show's educational value, but each group differed in what it found to be 'educational'.

One self-described twenty-two-year-old white, suburban, Pentecostal Christian wrote to say that *Good Times* was 'a show I can believe in. It is telling the truth about life in the projects, human nature, the social

21 Letter from Charles Holster, Wantagh, NY. Manings Collection. Box 1. All viewer mail is located in this box.

22 Letter from Louise D. Kleinsorge, Tiburon, CA, Manings Collection.

23 Letter from Manings to Ms. Teresa Green, Gary, MN, Manings Collection.

24 Letter from Diane Bennett, San Francisco, CA, Manings Collection.

25 Letter from Ms. Aiden B. Runnels, Assistant Professor, NYU, Manings Collection.

26 Letter from L. Boyce, Bronx, NY, Manings Collection. A similarly worded letter by this writer also appeared in *Ebony*. See Letters to the editor, *Ebony*, November 1975, p. 10.

problems of our day, religion in the home, etc. ... I don't think I've ever been very prejudiced but each week I think I get to understand black people better than I did before.²¹ A self-described white schoolteacher asserted that the show was 'absolutely *educational*. I recommend it to *all* my students and their parents (mind you, I'm in an upper-class white area.) I think we all have a lot to learn from the Evans family.'²² These white viewers emphasized not only their racial difference from the Evans family in making sense of the show's utility, but also their class difference. The white Christian in the suburbs of New York and the white teacher in a privileged enclave near San Francisco used the show's representation of black poverty as a marker of authenticity. Their racial and class distance from the Evans family worked together to mark the representation as truthful and real – perhaps largely *because* the distance was a dual one.

Good Times' white producer, Allan Manings, also circulated discourse about the educational nature of the series. To a letter asking about the show's philosophy, Manings replied: 'We believe that the presentation of a complete Black family on television has done a great deal to educate people about Blacks. ... Although the show is not a "crusade" by nature, it is certainly hoped that understanding of minority people and their problems will result.'²³ The obvious assumption here is that white viewers are to be the targets of this education, and also that seeing a representation of an intact black family is inherently educational.

While middle-class white viewers appeared to be the target of this 'educational' mandate, a number of self-identifying black teachers also wrote to Manings about the show. Most mentioned how much their predominantly black students enjoyed the series and how they discussed it in class. One teacher in San Francisco noted: 'It is certainly opening up a wholesome channel of communication between my students and I. Please keep it going. The positive self-image we need is coming through this program not just for blacks but for human beings.'²⁴ Another black educator, a sociologist at New York University, also pointed out the importance of positive images: 'As a teacher of a course called Black Life Styles ... the program does capture an authentic strand of Black Life. For one thing, it is [the] first program on television that recognizes the Black "family" – with a mother *and* a father. It also carries the spirit of Black life style; the desire for education; the take-off on the White power structure; the dignity; the tolerance; the love, of Black people.'²⁵ Another viewer noted: 'There is no "Typical" black family, but this family has a mother and father struggling to make it economically, and doing pretty well at instilling into their children appreciation of education, morality and common decency. Many families can relate to it, or maybe learn something from it.'²⁶ While the documentation of ghetto life and the vicissitudes of poverty helped to authenticate the series for numerous whites, black supporters focused on family structure as the educational

aspect of the series for black viewers. Black inner-city schoolchildren and their families presumably did not need *Good Times* to instruct them about being poor, but, according to these letter writers, the series was useful in instructing them about the nuclear family unit and the desirability of two-parent households.

While the representation of a poor ghetto family was at the heart of the show's presumptions to black 'authenticity', a small but significant number of letter writers were uncomfortable with this image of blackness. Responding to *Ebony's* first profile of the new series in which the magazine described the show as 'a slice of ghetto life as thick and juicy as a slab of salt pork simmering in a pot of collard greens', a number of letters subsequently published in the magazine questioned the image politics of depicting a poor black family.²⁷ One letter writer suggested that such a representation 'was quite encouraging to the white race and discouraging to the brothers and sisters'. Another letter asked, 'Why can't we have a program featuring a middle-class black family headed by a professional father? We know too well about lower-class living. . . . We need an ideal that we can strive toward rather than a show to cheer us up and make us content to laugh at the present predicament of our people.'²⁸ These sentiments were echoed by a number of letters written to Manings. One black viewer criticized the fact that the Evanses never seemed to rise above their current station. 'Why must the father be out of a steady job no matter how willing he is to work? Why can't he have some semblance of education, be it self-taught or acquired from institutions of learning? Why is the mother constantly looking for the picture of Jesus Christ to have mercy instead of arming herself with the strength of her faith and getting up and dealing with the problems at hand?' The writer also criticized JJ's stealing and Thelma's preoccupation with her looks. The writer goes on to say, 'The show does importantly portrait [sic] a black family that is pulling together. But that family is too stereotyped and more should be shown of them improving their situation.'²⁹ These viewers, unfortunately, would have a decade-long wait for the show they were calling for. In 1984, *The Cosby Show* did indeed give US viewers a black family that was middle class (actually upper class) with a professional father (and mother) that was in no way 'stereotyped'. In the politics of 'good role models', the representation of a poor black family that was not obviously 'movin' on up' would have little political utility to black audiences who, according to these viewers, needed lessons on how to rise above their situations.

Here we see a tension between the show's impulses towards 'realism' and its impulses towards 'positive role models'. It was far more 'realistic' to show how institutional racism and the vicissitudes of poverty trap families in a prison of disadvantage. On the other hand, such representations might not appear particularly empowering – at least not to black viewers with more middle-class sensibilities.

²⁷ Lucas, 'A "salt pork and collard greens" TV show', p. 51.

²⁸ 'Letters to the editor', *Ebony*, August 1974, pp. 16–17.

²⁹ Letter from Norma Jean Ellis, St Louis, MO, Manings Collection. Manings agrees with many of Ms. Ellis's criticisms and points out that JJ will no longer steal, Thelma will become a more rounded character, both Florida and James will be pursuing their high-school equivalency diplomas, and that Florida will spend less time with the portrait of Christ. 'In the next 21 weeks I think we will be covering many topics that will, I believe, meet with your approval.'

Kid Dyn-O-Mite: new minstrelsy?

Good Times was originally developed as a vehicle for Rolle, who had achieved great popularity as the tough-talking maid in Norman Lear's *All in the Family* spin-off hit, *Maude*. Having battled to secure a husband, Rolle's new series was supposed to focus on her character and John Amos as James Evans, Sr. According to producer Manings, if the show were to have a breakout star he initially thought it would be Ralph Carter as Michael.³⁰ However, early in the first season, popular attention shifted to the eldest son, jokester, jive-talker and aspiring artist, JJ. Jimmie Walker, who took the role, had never acted before, having made his career as a standup comic. His performance style thus differed markedly from the stage and screen-trained Rolle, Amos and Carter.³¹ He used his impossibly skinny and pointy body in much of his comedy, frequently sauntering across the set, elbows at odd angles, and long fingers jutting out. His famous catchphrase was inserted in an almost obligatory manner into each episode. For instance, in an episode where James completes a course in heavy equipment operation to qualify him for higher paying work, JJ proclaims: 'Hail to King James! A man of courage. A man of might. And the proud father of Kid [hand clap] DYN-O-MITE!' ³² The studio audience explodes. These moments were clearly privileged ones in the series and played to guaranteed audience response. His face, with big, rubbery lips and bug eyes, was used to comic effect with regular use of extreme closeups to accentuate his grinning, pop-eyed mugging (figure 9). No other cast member on the show engaged in this form of extreme, exaggerated physical comedy.

J. Fred MacDonald, in his historical look at blacks in US television, places JJ firmly within what he calls 'the age of new minstrelsy' of

30 Allan Manings interview, *The Making of Good Times*

31 BernNadette Stanis as Thelma was also a newcomer to acting. Ja'net Dubois, as wisecracking neighbour Willona, had extensive theatrical acting experience.

32 Episode titled 'A Really Cool Job', it aired 23 September 1975



Figure 9

33 J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: Afro-Americans in Television Since 1948* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1983), p. 186. For a more recent overview of this subject, see Donald Bogle, *Prime Time Blues: African Americans on Network Television* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

34 Marlon T. Riggs was director, producer and writer of *Color Adjustment* (1991). Two of the scholars who provide commentary about *Good Times* in the documentary are Henry Louis Gates and Herman Gray.

35 John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 133.

1970s black comedies. MacDonald describes JJ as 'ultimately related to Mr Tambo and Mr Bones, those demeaning coons of another century'.³³ Marlon Riggs, in his documentary exploration of the same subject matter, comes to similar conclusions. He superimposes images of nineteenth-century minstrel figures over a slow-motion compilation of shots of JJ prancing, and the similarity in bodily representation between the original and this latter-day minstrel is undeniable.³⁴

JJ is a troubling figure in this example of popular television because the show appeared to take seriously a mandate to present 'good role models' and to function as a force for racial amelioration and consciousness-raising among audiences. How could a project with such obviously liberal and racially aware intentions circulate such a retrograde and demeaning image of blackness? John Fiske's theories of popular culture are useful here. He argues that television can be progressive, but not radical. He points out that 'however we might wish to change the social meanings and textual representations of, say, women or nonwhite races, such change can only be slow and evolutionary, not radical and revolutionary, if the texts are to remain popular'.³⁵ Popular texts cannot be free of the power structures and racial regimes that dominate the social order and that attempt to privilege particular meanings. *Good Times* took a progressive step forward in circulating representations of an inner-city, intact black family, but negotiated that progressiveness in racial imagery with, as I have already noted, a familiar sitcom family of warmth and good humour, but also a more reactionary 'coonish' image traditionally associated in the white American imagination with 'black humour'. The show's white producers were most likely unaware of the minstrel lineage of their creation (and, as we will see below, Manings could get quite defensive on the subject), but they did know that many audiences found him funny. The familiarity of JJ's comedy and of his visual image may have made him comforting to viewers in the same way that the representations of familial warmth reassured them that this show really was about an evening of 'good times' rather than an evening of white guilt. *Good Times* without JJ might have been too radical, too different, to achieve the popular relevancy and polysemy necessary to allow 1970s heterogeneous audiences to find narrative purchase in this text.

In a reception context, the figure of JJ provided a great deal of productive and contentious discourse about the politics of racial imagery. Especially within the African-American press, Rolle and Walker circulated contesting analyses about the social and political significance of their show. In a major expose published in *Ebony* at the beginning of the show's second season that documented trouble on the set and discontent among the cast about the direction the series appeared to be taking, Rolle's and Walker's differing attitudes to the politics of black representation were on display. Rolle was quoted as complaining:

He's eighteen and he doesn't work. He can't read and write. He doesn't think. The show didn't start out to be that. Michael's role of a bright, thinking child has been subtly reduced. Little by little – with the help of the artist, I suppose, because they couldn't do that to me – they have made him [JJ] more stupid and enlarged the role. [Negative images] have been quietly slipped in on us through the character of the oldest child. I resent the imagery that says to black kids that you can make it by standing on the corner saying 'Dyn-o-mite'!³⁶

Here and in her many other press interviews, Rolle speaks within the discourse of civil rights and, to some extent, black power and afrocentricity. Rolle emphasizes over and over again the impact on black children of stereotyped black representations. This is much more her concern than responses from white viewers. Rolle clearly felt that the struggle over black images was a political one, and one that had significant repercussions for the African-American community. In another story in *Ebony* during the show's first season, she said: 'I've always been selective about my roles ... still am ... I couldn't like me if I depicted crap that made a black child hang its head. I feel an obligation to do something that will make him stick his little chest out and say, "Did you see *that!*?" My goal is to give black women dignity.'³⁷ Rolle's discourse connects her acting to the black community and its empowerment. Her series was a part of that community and needed to be responsive to it. *Good Times* thus had 'extra-special effects', a term Phillip Brian Harper has coined to describe this view of the role played by representation in the black community. According to Harper, these representations have been the focus of so much attention and debate because they are 'seen as having effects that extend beyond the domain of signs as such and into the realm of African-Americans' material well-being, which comprises, among other factors, the social relations through which black people's status in this country is conditioned'.³⁸

Walker's discourse, on the other hand, was almost wholly apolitical, reflecting no sense that black representations mattered, or that *Good Times* as a television series was in any way pursuing a black empowerment agenda, or had any effects on black material conditions at all. In the *Ebony* article, Walker responded to questions about positive black images, by declaring, 'I don't think any TV show can put out an image to save people'.³⁹ In *Jet*, Walker argued, 'It's a tough situation, having kids. ... So parents sit them down in front of a TV and they want me to be a babysitter. That's not my job. ... Kids need parental guidance – they shouldn't look to me or the TV for that.'⁴⁰ Walker's public persona repeatedly stressed individuality: the emphasis was always on his own career, his hard work and his drive to succeed. His discourse never suggested any connection to the black community

³⁶ Louie Robinson, 'Bad times on the "Good Times" set', *Ebony*, September 1975, p. 35

³⁷ Lucas, 'A "salt pork and collard greens" TV show', p. 53

³⁸ Phillip Brian Harper, 'Extra-special effects: televisual representation and the claims of "the black experience"', in Sasha Torres (ed.), *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 62

³⁹ Robinson, 'Bad times on the "Good Times" set', p. 38

⁴⁰ 'Television's new season unveils JJ in new role', *Jet*, 9 September 1976, p. 62

or its needs. For the twentysomething Walker, the struggles of the civil rights and black power movements seemed irrelevant. JJ and his creator emphatically refused to participate in the 'struggle for blackness', refused to acknowledge racial power issues that structured representation: 'All I do is deliver the lines the writers [by now mostly white] turn out for the series'.⁴¹

Executive producer Manings also weighed into the debate about JJ. While very few letters in the producer's collected papers deal with the controversy, Manings's responses to the handful of letters that did raise questions about the character are telling in their extreme defensiveness.⁴² One gets the sense that Manings was very touchy about any suggestion that his series was less than exemplary in its approach to black images. His stock response to critical letters was to accuse the letter writer of racism. One viewer, operating within the same discursive frame as Rolle, complained about JJ as a negative role model:

As you know racism is directed most virulently at black males in this age group and I dare say that most of the appeal of the character to white viewers lies in the fact that you have decided to portray JJ as a poor student who is quite silly. Art ability as attached to the portrayal has some ameliorative effect but the stereotype of an anti-intellectual clown feeds white racism and is hurting efforts to develop black youth.⁴³

To this not unreasonable critique, Manings replied:

Forgive me if I detect a note of racism in your letter when you indicate the appeal of JJ to white viewers is based on his being silly and a poor student. Rather than being silly, the character is that of a clown who sees things a little bit different than other members of his family and he is a very serious student of his art. I must point out to you that JJ is not only liked by whites but our mail indicates that he is equally or more loved by black viewers and quite often for his artistic aspirations.⁴⁴

While Rolle, along with this viewer, emphasized JJ's detrimental image for black youth, Manings, perhaps suffering a bout of sublimated white liberal guilt, tried to convince his correspondent (and perhaps himself) that JJ was actually a positive role model. Downplaying the buffoonish aspects of the character that were JJ's main claim to fame, Manings insisted on overemphasizing his artistic abilities (figure 10). Proclaimed Manings: 'We have in many episodes indicated JJ referring to art books and art history books. He has been and will be involved in art shows. He will study in art school and work to support himself.' JJ's art career was, of course, only a rather artificial add-on. As Donald Bogle has noted, 'Nothing about JJ ever suggested he had any artistic impulse or temperament'.⁴⁵ For a liberal like Manings (and likely his white writers, too) obviously moulded by the political ideals of the civil

⁴¹ Bob Williams, 'Jimmy [sic] Walker defends JJ', *New York Post*, 1 November 1977, p. 46.

⁴² The letters are dated no later than February 1975. Public controversy about the series did not really hit until the beginning of the 1975–76 season, after the *Ebony* expose was published in September 1975.

⁴³ Letter from William F. Brazziel, Mansfield Center, CT, Manings Collection.

⁴⁴ There is no evidence in the letters in Manings's collected papers for the assertion that black viewers loved JJ particularly for his artistic ambitions. While such letters may well have existed, they did not make it into this collection.

⁴⁵ Bogle, *Primetime Blues*, p. 203.



Figure 10

46 Letter from Alan Manings to Teresa Green. Manings Collection.

rights movement, the unexpected pop culture phenomenon of JJ could only have been a mixed blessing. In his letters to viewers, Manings speaks the discourse of colour-blind integrationism, but also the discourse of good role models. In one letter Manings explains the problem of getting the right stories and 'the added [problem] of being as positive as possible that nothing we do will be derogatory to Blacks ... or to anyone'.⁴⁶ Manings found himself with a minstrel coon on his hands, a representation that was utterly at odds with his discourse of positive images. On the other hand, this minstrel coon had helped shoot Manings's series into the Nielsen top ten. Unlike Rolle, Manings could not separate himself from the phenomenon of JJ. Manings thus had to negotiate the representation and find a race-positive reading strategy for decoding the character. Over-privileging JJ's artistic aspirations and his presumed appeal to black viewers may have assuaged Manings's liberal guilt that a television series premised on 'authenticity' and 'good role models' had, at its centre, a figure that undercut all these representational ideals. Manings also attempted to find solace in the argument that JJ was not, in fact, the creation of whites after all. Responding to the letter writer who criticized JJ and made a point about the ludicrous costuming of black performers, Manings wrote: 'It is somewhat arrogant of you to assume that white writers and white directors and not a black actor put that hat on JJ'. If a black performer created this representation then it could not be detrimental: it was 'authentically' black. And the white production personnel who amplified and profited from this creation were in no way culpable for its circulation.

The increasingly centrality of JJ did have some fans, however. A visiting scholar at the rightwing American Enterprise Institute had this to say in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*: "'Good Times" is now

47 Ronald Berman, 'JJ and the limits of human nature', *Wall Street Journal*, 15 April 1977, p. 14. This commentary was written about the series after John Amos as James Evans, Sr had left the series. See following section for more on this

essentially a showcase for Jimmy [sic] Walker. . . . The new format puts JJ at the center where he has room to operate. The action is fast-paced – some of the vignettes aren't much more than thirty seconds long. Basically the script tries not to fight the character, to allow JJ to bring things to a halt every few minutes. No one is much interested in the plot anyhow, which is characteristic of good comedy.⁴⁷ This writer appears uncomfortable with socially and politically engaged approaches to comedy – the social relevance that was a trademark of the comedies associated with Norman Lear. Black and white supporters of *Good Times* in its early incarnation lauded the series precisely *because* it constructed its plots around African-American social problems: for instance, hypertension in black men, the problems of youth gangs, the high cost of uninsured medical care, price fixing at ghetto grocery stores. Plots like these that circulated discourses from a black perspective may indeed have been uncomfortable for conservative whites like the *Wall Street Journal* columnist. JJ's rise to centrality tended to shunt such narrative preoccupations into the margins, and with them any pretence to a liberal, educational mandate. The rise of Kid Dyn-O-Mite indicates just how difficult it was to sustain discourses about African-American poverty, 'positive images', and empowering representations of 'blackness' in prime time. The *Wall Street Journal* piece gives some clue to the kind of white resistance such socially engaged representations could face.

The return of a 'black matriarchy': killing off James Evans, Sr

Following the rise of JJ as star, the next major blow to the politics of authenticity for *Good Times* was the departure of Amos after the third season. Press accounts differed over whether Amos had asked to be released from his contract or whether he had been fired. The African-American press, privileging the discourse of Amos and the people around him, presented the correct version of events. Amos had been extremely and uncompromisingly critical of scripts and of the elevation of JJ, and he had a generally abrasive relationship with Lear. New York's black newspaper, the *Amsterdam News*, put the situation into a context of black-white power relations, suggesting a master-slave dynamic: 'Here was ol' Norm giving all these spooks new sacks to pick cotton and there they were complainin' about the plantation'.⁴⁸ In 1974 *Good Times* had been touted in the African-American press as Evans's and Monte's show and thus, implicitly, the property of black creators. Now, in 1976, it was Lear's plantation. White power was now in control and blacks were back in their familiar, disempowered positions. The article pointed out that Evans and Monte were no longer involved and that the series had almost no black writers. All the markers of black 'authenticity' were now gone. The St Louis *Sentinel* mourned: 'What started as a promising comedy series about a struggling black family in a Chicago slum has degenerated into a slap

48 Mel Tapley, 'Is "Good Times" a fatherless family', *Amsterdam News*, 22 May 1976, p. D2

49 'John Amos tired of J.J., so he's leaving "Good Times"', *St. Louis Sentinel*, 13 May 1976, p. 1

50 Les Brown, "'Good Times' will drop male parent, Black Media Coalition protests move', *New York Times*, 7 June 1976, p. 59

51 Jacqueline Trescott, 'Good times and hard times', *Washington Post*, 2 November 1976, p. C1

52 Brown, "'Good Times' will drop male parent', p. 59

53 Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), p. 65

54 *Ibid.*, p. 67. Neal is quoting here from Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's baby, papa's maybe: an American grammar book', in Winston Napier (ed.), *African American Literary Theory: a Reader* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), p. 277

55 *Ibid.*, p. 65

happy showcase of bellylaughs starring a 1976 adolescent version of Stepin Fetchit'.⁴⁹

The most tragic and ironic aspect of Amos's departure was that the first black television family with a strong male head was now suddenly fatherless. Like Julia Baker before her, Rolle's Florida would now be in exactly the situation the actress had resisted so vehemently when the series was in development: Florida was to be a single mother after all. Manings, who had proudly emphasized in letters to viewers the importance of portraying an intact black family, was quoted saying: 'There are other realities that deserve exploration – the fatherless family does exist in the ghetto'.⁵⁰ It certainly would be more 'realistic' to portray the Evans family as fatherless. However, only Amos's powerful presence as a counter to JJ gave legitimacy to the claim that the series was portraying good role models. With James's disappearance, the show descended into a crisis of black representation.

The National Black Media Coalition, a Washington, DC-based lobbying group, immediately sprang into action. The group was convinced of the show's 'extra-special effects' for the black community and the negative ramifications for African-Americans' material circumstances in this decision. The Coalition launched a letter-writing campaign to the show's producers demanding an immediate replacement for Amos.⁵¹ Coalition chairman Pluria Marshall, quoted in the *New York Times*, argued that black children, who watched a great deal of television, 'desperately need positive black male images'. He quoted from a recent Howard University study about the meanings black youngsters made of televised black images. According to the study's examination of *Good Times*, the children perceived James as a weak provider; however, 'he was clearly seen as a strong father figure by black children viewing the show'.⁵² Killing off James would be akin to depriving these children of a virtual father, and the impact would be not unlike the loss of a flesh-and-blood patriarch.

Mark Anthony Neal in his recent book about black popular culture, *Soul Babies*, discusses at length the significance of both James's presence in, and disappearance from, the Evans family. He argues that, within the white liberal imagination, the Evanses were portrayed in 'an old "Negro" paradigm that was destined to die off as more blacks were afforded the educational opportunities that would better prepare them for what was being touted, at least within popular culture and liberal political rhetoric, as post-race America'.⁵³ The only hope of survival was in the presence of the strong, stabilizing patriarch. The viewer letters that criticized the Evanses as a poor family that never rose above its situation were responding to this paradigm. With James's death, the show and its black audiences suddenly had to grapple with the anguish of 'a cultural situation that is father-lacking'.⁵⁴ Neal argues that the fictional death of James 'has become a metaphor for the absence of black men in the black community, and that this absence represents a kind of trauma for the community'.⁵⁵ He points to a number of recent

56 Ibid.

57 Judy Ann Mason and Ralph Carter interviews, *The Making of Good Times*.

58 George Maksian, 'Esther "Good Times" going bad', *New York Daily News*, 26 October 1977, p. 102.

59 Irma Kalish interview, *The Making of Good Times*.

black popular cultural references to James's death in hip hop lyrics and in television programmes produced by African-Americans. Why are these members of the post-civil rights/black power-era generation recovering this particular moment in popular culture? Neal suggests that it is 'lodged in [the generation's] collective memory' as loss and trauma.⁵⁶

The death of James also appeared to be intensely painful to the African-American creative personnel who worked on the series. In a documentary about the making of *Good Times*, Judy Ann Mason, one of the show's very few black writers, speaks in rather anguished tones about the situation: 'They killed that family when they killed that father. The show died when James Evans died.' Carter, the actor who played Michael, recalled that the show was no longer the same and that he no longer enjoyed the work after Amos left.⁵⁷ A year later, Rolle also left the series, telling the *New York Daily News*, 'They're not interested in the poor images that are being put across to the young viewers'.⁵⁸ Irma Kalish, one of the show's principal writers, recalls Lear coming to her and the other writers to ask if they could do a show without the mother or the father: 'We said we could. We could deal with it'.⁵⁹ In the struggle for 'blackness', authenticity and ownership, white power prevailed over black sociocultural needs. White creative personnel may have been able to 'deal with' the amputation of the Evans family, treating it as merely another writing problem to solve on just another television sitcom that was beginning to lose its vitality. For black creative personnel and for black audiences, the stakes appeared to be much higher.

The end of good times

After Amos's departure the series limped along for three more years, descending steadily in the ratings each season. The producers and writers tried to give Florida a new man to fill the empty space, but the attempt was not successful. JJ began finally to 'grow up', taking a job in an advertising agency and becoming less overtly buffoonish – but also less funny. New characters were introduced in a vain attempt to revitalize the show. The series tried to reconnect with its socially relevant origins by having the Evans family's wisecracking neighbour Willona adopt an abused child. After bowing out in the fifth season, Rolle agreed to return in the sixth, and ultimately final, season, telling the *Amsterdam News* that 'she feels it isn't her right to withhold from the public anything that would help the imagery'. In a final attempt to assert a measure of black cultural ownership over the representations, Rolle proclaimed to the paper's black readership that she could do something to assert a higher quality in the scripts. She pointed out a problem with the writers scripting Willona as constantly going out, leaving little Penny, her adopted daughter, with the Evans family: 'This is a lack of supervision and it couldn't happen with me in the show. I'd

refuse to do it. They can't be that loose in my house!'⁶⁰ From 'ole Norm's plantation' the discourse of cultural ownership now tried to turn *Good Times* into 'Mama Florida's house'.

CBS cancelled the series during the 1978–79 season, but perhaps attempting to appease those viewers who wanted the Evanses to transcend their situation, the final episode, in a *deus ex machina*, finally moves them and their neighbour Willona out of the projects. JJ announces that he has sold his comic strip idea to a newspaper syndicate, Thelma's football-playing husband announces that he has finally received a pro-ball contract, and Willona announces that she has been promoted to head buyer for her clothing store. After five years of toiling within the permanent underclass, suddenly the Evanses were to be vaulted into the black middle class. Viewers, of course, would never get to see them assume their upwardly mobile positions.

Although *Good Times* left prime time in August 1979, the show's cultural half-life has continued in the recovery activity that Neal discusses, and in its influence on latter-day black representations, such as the 1990s black family sitcom, *Family Matters* (ABC, tx 1989–98). That show's breakout star, Jaleel White as Steve Urkel, while more intellectually equipped than JJ Evans, recirculated the clownish, physically grotesque characteristics of Kid Dyn-O-Mite.

Unresolved questions remain about the cultural legacy of the show's racial imagery. What can we say about the show's effort to circulate 'positive images', and for whom might those images be 'positive'? Conflicting testimony from two of *Good Times*' creative personnel suggest the complex and racially charged nature of such questions. The documentary on the making of *Good Times* juxtaposes the assessments of Mason, a black writer for the series, and Austin Kalish, a white writer-producer for the show. Mason, in an emotional and personally troubled tone states, 'I left that show very ashamed of the fact that I had worked on the show.... There was so much pain... in realizing that maybe we had done something wrong. The attempt to present realistic black life had failed and we'd failed miserably because nobody wanted us around anymore.' In a more neutral and impersonal tone, Kalish observes, '[*Good Times* will] always be relevant because it's about a family, and it has to do with a family hanging together'.⁶¹

Like Rolle, Mason takes personal responsibility as an African-American for the show and its representations. She emphasizes the ramifications to the black community of these 'failed' images. To have failed in circulating 'realistic' images of black life has its costs. Kalish, on the other hand, evacuates any sign of blackness from his discourse – *Good Times* is not ultimately about blackness or positive black representations, it is merely about positive families. By not assessing the show on its struggle over the representation of blackness, Kalish can deem the show a success for his colourless audience. Mason, on the other hand, bogged down by an unrealizable quest for the authentic,

61 Interviews with Judy Ann Mason, Austin Kalish, *The Making of Good Times*

could see the show as nothing but a tragic failure for black audiences and the wider black community.

Ultimately the show was both a success and a failure. Its groundbreaking attempts to circulate progressive and empowering images of African-Americans along with socially relevant representations of poverty and racism inevitably needed to be harnessed to older, regressive images so as not to alienate and alarm white audiences. The saga of *Good Times* reveals that prime-time television could indeed provide a venue for the exploration of hitherto unrepresented aspects of African-American life in the wake of the 1960s revolution in race relations. However, such representations could only be compromised ones. As a popular cultural institution, prime-time television could no more transcend power structures of white dominance and meaning construction than could other social, cultural or political institutions. That prime-time television served as a venue for negotiating new and potentially empowering representations for African-Americans during this period is, however, a testament to the cultural effectiveness of the movement for black empowerment. For a short period, black cultural producers with their liberal white allies (albeit soon-to-be-adversaries) managed to circulate a discourse that was different, grounded in the particularities of inner-city black life, and did so from at least the semblance of a black point of view.

'Televerite' hits Britain: documentary, drama and the growth of 16mm filmmaking in British television

JAMIE SEXTON

- 1 More recently this includes Jonathan Bignell, Stephen Lacy and Madeleine Macmuraugh-Kavanagh (eds), *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future* (New York, NY, and Houndmills Palgrave, 2000); John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Madeleine Macmuraugh-Kavanagh, "Drama" into "news": strategies of intervention in "The Wednesday Play", *Screen*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1997); Madeleine Macmuraugh-Kavanagh, "The BBC and the birth of 'The Wednesday Play', 1964-70: institutional containment versus 'agitational contemporaneity'", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1997).
- 2 See, for example, Caughie, *Television Drama*; John Corner, *The Art of Record: a Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

Much critical attention has been paid to the emergence in the mid 1960s of an increasingly radical form of British television drama, and particularly to innovative work from figures such as Troy Kennedy Martin, Ken Loach, James McTaggart and John McGrath.¹ Most of this attention has focused on key issues such as the politicization of television drama, modernist interventions, the merging of documentary and drama, and a move away from a televisual ontology of 'liveness'.² Although these issues are also relevant to my argument here, my approach is from a different perspective, focusing on the relationship between aesthetic innovation and technological change, and in particular the impact of 16mm (and subsequently 16mm synch sound) filmmaking. This perspective not only extends the contextual framework within which such dramatic interventions materialized, but also raises wider questions about the relations between technology and aesthetics.

The impact of technological change on television aesthetics has been largely overlooked within television history, and its significance marginalized. The use of 16mm has been noted sporadically as an important feature of televisual innovation, but has not been investigated in any detail. The taint of 'technological determinism' has deflected researchers from the investigation of 'influences' of technology. Yet technology does play an extremely important role in shaping the

- 3 Wiebe Bijker, *Of Babelites and
Bulbs: Toward a Theory of
Sociotechnical Change*
(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,
1997), p. 274

- 4 Bruno Latour, 'The Prince for
machines as well as for
machinations', in Brian Elliott
ed., *Technology and Social
Process* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh
University Press, 1988), p. 33.

parameters of television production. In this essay, I shall consider the impact of technology not from a monocausal, determinist position, but within a framework of interlocking influences, viewing technology as a result of broader social factors as well as a factor that itself shapes the social. As the sociotechnological theorist Wiebe Bijker argues:

Society is not determined by technology, nor is technology determined by society. Both emerge as two sides of the sociotechnical coin during the construction process of artefacts, facts and relevant social groups.³

Similarly, Bruno Latour has stressed the importance of technology in relation to the social: social relations are meaningless without the non-human actors that keep them in place, whilst technological hardware is meaningless without the strategic position it occupies.⁴ Society and technology are thus intricately intertwined; a situation that renders simple cause-and-effect explanations inadequate and calls instead for an investigation into a series of connections.

In this essay, then, I shall study the impact of 16mm film on the aesthetics of television drama and documentary within 1960s television, but not in such a way that these chief elements are isolated from broader institutional, cultural and economic factors. I thus hope to provide a more detailed analysis of how documentary and then drama were transformed through creative innovation and technological application. By looking at the impact of 16mm primarily within the fields of documentary and drama, I want to consider how important an influence documentary aesthetics and 16mm film were on what has been considered the 'golden age' of television drama.

'Liveness' and ontology

Film was only gradually introduced into the television production process and it met with a hostile response from many people working within the industry. One reason for this was a widespread belief in the specificity of television as a 'live' and 'immediate' medium, clearly distinguishable from related media such as cinema. This ontological view of the medium was also a reflection of its broadcasting lineage, allying it with radio, a medium from which many television staff had been recruited. Whilst 'liveness' within radio was a source of its appeal, the medium could also use recording devices to bring the outside world into its purview. Though these voices were not often live at broadcast, they nevertheless incorporated the spontaneity and immediacy of the everyday into radio. Television was similarly tied to the studio, yet could capture the sounds and images of the everyday. Adherence to 'liveness' was to be gradually transformed by the increasing use of film, particularly 16mm film, within television production. 16mm synch sound film came more and more to be seen as the appropriate apparatus for recording outside events that were beyond

the capability of live, outside broadcasting (OB) equipment. The new technology was considered more suitable for capturing the spontaneous and the immediate. The aesthetic of 'liveness' would persist longer within drama than within documentary, but, as I hope to show, the transformation of documentary aesthetics would eventually feed into drama productions.

Peter Black has written of television's appetite for live transmission, of how 'people would be entertained by watching other people's night out, the magic being provided simply by the fact that they were seeing it as it happened'.⁵ This live observation of everyday life was, however, restricted by cumbersome OB equipment. In order to move around freely and follow events, a lightweight film camera was needed. Grace Wyndham Goldie has described the limitations of live OB recording:

By using outside broadcasting cameras television could let viewers see events at the moment they were taking place. But getting outside broadcast units to any particular place was a complex business; it took time and the areas which they could transmit were limited. For events known well in advance, Royal occasions, football matches and race meetings, they were excellently suited. But for unpredictable developments, news which broke suddenly anywhere in the world, outside broadcasts were useless and were to remain largely so.⁶

So OB units were able to film some external events as they unfolded, but only very specific events, and even those without much flexibility or spontaneity. Live shooting within a studio could be more fluid, yet it was continually struggling to represent reality through artifice, a problem exacerbated when constructing documentaries, or dramas that were striving to attain a degree of surface authenticity.

After the war, filmed material was increasingly used for news and documentary material. During the 1950s it was used as insert material in magazine programmes and within drama, sports and children's programmes.⁷ 35mm film was the preferred gauge for television filmmaking in the 1950s, but this was an expensive format; 16mm offered a cheaper, more mobile alternative. It had entered the film world as an amateur gauge in 1923 and was increasingly 'professionalized' through continued technical improvements and its supersession within the amateur film market by 8mm. Although it was felt by many that 16mm was suited to the small screen, it was still tainted by its association with amateurism and looked down on for its low image resolution – despite the fact that this was of little consequence when displayed on a 405-line television screen. 16mm did, however, begin to be used more frequently in news and current affairs, as these areas were regarded as more journalistic than aesthetic, while in drama the quality of image was seen as more important.

A key development in the history of 16mm film was ITN's use of the gauge from 1957 for its news broadcasts. ITV, the new alternative

5 Peter Black, *The Mirror in the Corner: People's Television* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 19

6 Grace Wyndham Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television and Politics 1936–1976* (London: The Bodley Head, 1977), p. 44

7 Steve Bryant, *The Television Heritage* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), p. 6

8 David Robinson, 'News story', *Contrast*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1962), p. 189.

9 Norman Swallow, *Factual Television* (London: Focal Press, 1966), p. 74.

10 J.K. Byers, 'Television film production', *Journal of the Television Society*, vol. 9, no. 5 (1960), p. 169.

11 Caughie, *Television Drama*, pp. 88–102.

12 For a discussion of early dramatized documentaries, see Elaine Bell, 'The origins of British television documentary: the BBC, 1946–1955', in John Corner (ed.), *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986).

to the more traditional BBC, was more prepared to take a risk with the format and boasted of the advantages that 16mm film provided: quicker film processing and greater mobility.⁸ Between 1957 and 1963, 16mm filmmaking was used increasingly for news, current affairs and documentary filmmaking, in which the importance capturing events, as well as the cheapness and speed of the gauge, overtook concerns about the inherent 'quality' of the image.⁹ The BBC was quick to exploit the economic advantages of the stock when it became clear that there was no strong audience resistance to its use. Gradually, in line with technical improvements in sound and image quality and reduced camera weight, more documentary work was produced on 16mm film stock. At this point, it should be noted, the predominant use of 16mm film was with non-synch equipment, which could only produce mobility of image, as opposed to sound. Synchronized sound set-ups using previously available technology would have created too much noise and necessitated blimping the camera, which would have reduced its mobility.¹⁰

This increasing use of film within television meant that the adherence to 'liveness' was compromised. Nevertheless, it still had a significant impact upon the way in which production was conceived, particularly within dramatic production. In terms of film's use within news, current affairs and documentary, emphasis shifted from 'liveness' to 'immediacy'. Whilst these terms were sometimes used interchangeably – and have been by academic commentators such as John Caughie¹¹ – it is important to note a crucial difference between the two. Live action in an early dramatized documentary, for example, was immediate in the sense that it was broadcast live, with people acting in front of the camera as it was shot; but it was not immediately connected to the event that it was representing because it was separated from it both temporally and spatially.¹² Lightweight film cameras could, therefore, be adapted to fit into pre-existing notions of televisual 'immediacy', if not 'liveness'. They were spatially, if not temporally, immediate in the sense that they were able to cover diverse spatial locations and catch events as they unfolded. The fact that there was a delay between shooting and transmission meant that they attained a kind of 'virtual liveness'.

Thus, at least within news, current affairs and documentary, the concept of 'immediacy' became redefined in relation to technological developments (and in turn was privileged over 'liveness'). From the early use of 16mm by 'personal' documentary filmmakers such as Dennis Mitchell, through to the employment of 16mm synchronized cameras in the current affairs series *World in Action* (Granada, tx 1962–98), the dialectic between filmmaker and subject was reconstructed. The technological formation of realistic codes altered, eventually affecting other aspects of television, particularly drama, where such codes were borrowed in order to make both formal and critical interventions.

The emergence of 'televerite'

The use of 16mm film continued to increase during the early 1960s in current affairs, a range of documentary programmes (including wildlife and arts documentaries) and children's programmes.¹³ It was in the area of the 'personal' documentary that critics located a new, innovative mode of television documentary filmmaking. 'Personal' documentaries were described by Elwyn Jones as 'mood pieces shot on film',¹⁴ and can loosely be allied with the more ambitious 'poetic' documentaries that were made in the interwar years by filmmakers such as Basil Wright and Humphrey Jennings. The most celebrated proponent of this mode of television documentary at the time (and arguably ever since) was Dennis Mitchell. Mitchell, who had moved to television from radio, began to make short films to be included in *Special Enquiry* (BBC, tx 1952–7), a magazine-style current affairs programme that was innovative in using an increasing percentage of film within its studio format.¹⁵ A short film on teenagers made by Mitchell for *Special Enquiry* met with critical acclaim and led to him being regarded as a television auteur. His use of a lightweight, portable sound recorder and non-synchronous images to create a structured series of montage fragments was seen as both aesthetically and technically innovative.¹⁶

Whilst Mitchell had used 35mm in his earlier productions, he soon turned to 16mm cameras, which appealed to him because of their greater mobility and ease of use. He used a silent 16mm camera and portable sound apparatus within much of his work in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which included programmes such as *Morning in the Streets* (BBC, tx 25 March 1959) and *Chicago* (BBC, tx 21 February 1961). In the former, for example, a working-class milieu is evoked through an accumulation of carefully composed images, whilst working-class voices express their views on various aspects of life, their words often tinged with a tragic quality.

Within the BBC, the use of 16mm within the 'personal' mode of television documentary was still regarded with suspicion, as this was a form that was considered to be more reliant on sound and picture 'quality' than news footage. In 1958 David Wheeler, head of Talks, wrote that 16mm 'need not be inferior provided certain cautions are taken';¹⁷ whilst these 'cautions' are not explicitly spelled out, one can assume that he is referring to such procedures as careful framing and an avoidance of unsteady camera movement. In this regard, Mitchell's films conformed to the institutional protocols. Yet whilst the 1960s did bring an increase in the use of 16mm film in the television documentary, it was by no means yet the norm. The BBC was not confident enough about the gauge to establish a 16mm film unit until 1964; before this, documentary programme-makers wanting to use the gauge would have had to ask about hiring equipment.¹⁸

The early 1960s witnessed the rise of American direct cinema (or

13 Information on the increased use of 16mm film in BBC programmes can be found in the BBC Written Archive Centre Files (hereafter BBC WAC), T31/332/1 TV Staff, Film Department – Film Effort, 1958–61.

14 Letter from Elwyn Jones, Drama Documentary supervisor, to Michael Barry, head of Television Drama (27 February 1961). BBC WAC, T16/61/2 TV Policy, Documentary Programmes, 1955–67.

15 John Corner, 'Documentary voices', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), pp. 43–9; Paddy Scannell, 'The social eye of television, 1946–1957', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1979), p. 104.

16 Corner, 'Documentary voices', p. 48. Mitchell used a magnetic tape recorder which was both light and easy to edit. This was a technique that he had previously used in his radio documentaries. In the later 1950s and early 1960s he used a Perfectone and an L-2 recorder. Information from BBC WAC, T31/379 Dennis Mitchell, 1957–62.

17 Letter from David Wheeler to Rex Moorfoot, assistant head of Talks (20 November 1958). BBC WAC, T31/332/1 TV Staff, Film Department – Film Effort, 1958–61.

18 T31/332/3 TV Staff, Film Department – Film Effort, 1964–67. Memo from Joanna Spicer (assistant controller) to C.P. Tel (undated). The documentary filmmaker Philip Donnellan, for example, had repeatedly asked for the BBC Midlands Documentary Unit to purchase 16mm equipment. See BBC WAC, T31/66/2 TV Staff, Documentary Department, 1955–67.

19 It should be noted here that American direct cinema was at this time referred to by critics and practitioners as 'cinéma vérité', hence the derivation 'televerite'. I have used the term 'direct cinema' to refer to the US model, however, as it is now generally considered that it is distinct from 'cinéma vérité', which refers to a French model of filmmaking, most notably films made by Jean Rouch.

20 Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), pp. 220–37.

21 This is the only episode that I have seen as other episodes were not available at the time of researching this article. More recently the episode entitled *Marion Knight* has become available. The series was shown between 10.20 and 10.35 pm between 24 August and 25 September 1963.

22 Robert Vas, 'Bristol breakthrough', *Contrast*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1963), p. 107.

23 Michel Ciment, *John Boorman*, trans. Gilbert Adair (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 45.

cinéma vérité) filmmaking, which proved to be influential within areas of British television.¹⁹ Filmmakers such as Richard Leacock, the Maysles brothers and Don Pennebaker, originally working within television under the supervision of Robert Drew at Time, developed and utilized new technological advances for 16mm equipment. They modified existing cameras in order to make them lighter and easier to use, and developed methods to synchronize camera and sound recorder without any wire connections, so that the mobility of a camera crew was greatly enhanced. The film that marked the 'arrival' of direct cinema was *Primary* (Richard Leacock, 1960). A record of the 1960 Democratic presidential primary elections, it was seen as marking a new stage in documentary through its use of hand-held, extremely mobile (sometimes shaky) camera movement, its use of available light, and long takes. Also, in contrast to conventional television documentaries, these films did not use voiceover narration. *Primary* was rejected by the US networks, but its reputation did play a key part in Drew Associates sealing a deal with ABC to produce four films under the banner *Close-Up*. These included *Yanki No!* (1960) and *Children are Watching* (1960).²⁰

In the UK during 1963, direct cinema techniques were seen as increasingly influential within the realm of the 'personal' documentary. In line with such a perceived influence, the phrase 'televerite' began to be used by British critics. The first instance I have found of this phrase is in relation to John Boorman's five-part series *Citizen 63* (BBC, tx 1963), which documented the lives of 'ordinary' people. The most acclaimed episode in the series was *Barry Langford* (tx 28 August 1963), featuring the eponymous silverware trader and pop star manager.²¹ The film follows the character around, mixing synch sequences with voiceover comments from Langford himself. The enhanced directness of the programme, allied with the fact that there is no 'interpretation' of the events from a programme-maker, were qualities that alerted critics to the influence of direct cinema (or, as they preferred to call it at the time, cinéma vérité). Writing in the television journal *Broadcast*, critic and documentary filmmaker Robert Vas thought that the similarity was in the filmmaker's 'capacity to follow the character without attempting to impose a thesis of his own'.²²

There are similarities between Boorman's programme and direct cinema, but there are also major differences. Boorman did not use lightweight, synch-sound cameras for *Barry Langford*, and this results in a more 'self-conscious' aesthetic approach to the material: when showing synchronous shots, the camera, which is quite mobile and adventurous in some non-synch sequences, becomes static. In addition, Boorman's film is more stylized than direct cinema films, a point that Boorman himself made when stressing differences between *Citizen 63* and the majority of direct cinema films.²³ For example, at the beginning of *Barry Langford* there is a montage of stills and a voiceover by Langford himself; throughout the episode, camera positioning and shot

24 Dai Vaughan, 'Rooting for Magoo: a tentative politics of the zoom lens', in *On Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 144

composition have been carefully pre-planned; popular jazz also features on the soundtrack. This is not to argue that direct cinema films did not contain any self-conscious, stylistic sequences (witness the montage of feet in *Primary*, for instance); rather it is to demarcate differences in the degree of formal control exercised. Conversely, however, it could be argued that the camera movement in *Barry Langford* is less self-conscious than the camera operations found in direct cinema films. In the latter, especially in *Primary*, the camera is foregrounded through its attempts to keep up with ongoing actions, its process of recording inscribed within the final print of the film – what Dai Vaughan terms the 'we-were-there-ness' of the camera operator.²⁴ In *Barry Langford* the camera is more self-effacing, and overt stylistic elements occur much more on the level of editing and mise-en-scene.

It is clear that direct cinema did influence areas of BBC production in this period, but what at this time was called 'televerite' was a strange hybrid of a number of influences and techniques. Perhaps the two most prominent influences can be seen as direct cinema and the more self-consciously aesthetic documentaries which emerged from the British documentary film movement (associated with figures such as Basil Wright, Paul Rotha and Jennings). Such an influence is no surprise considering that Rotha himself was head of Documentary Production from 1953–55. This influence instilled a strong belief in many that documentary filmmaking was a merging of social reportage and creative expression. Thus many rejected a wholesale adoption of direct cinema techniques because they did not believe in the attempts to attain 'objectivity', despite their excitement about the new sense of dynamism and reality reflected in these films.

The commitment to an individual, expressive mode of communication should also be considered alongside institutional protocols when seeking causal factors in the modification of direct cinema techniques within British television. These modifications should be seen not only as a symptom of artistic temperament (or a tradition exerting its cultural influence), but also as a result of institutional resistance to the forms of direct cinema. It is true that the tenets of 'objectivity' associated with direct cinema would have been accepted by the documentary and talks departments, but the improvisational nature of event capture and shaky camerawork were still seen as a form of amateurism within the professional television environment rather than an attempt to institute a new form of televisual aesthetics. In particular, there appears to have been no use within the BBC around this time of 16mm synchronized sound equipment, as employed by direct cinema filmmakers. It would appear that this mode of filming was considered to be too raw (for example, risking the inclusion of muffled sound) and uncontrolled. In this sense, various institutional constraints and traditions were key in suppressing any radical change in television production methods.

World In Action and direct cinema

Within the institutional milieu of Independent Television direct cinema techniques became increasingly apparent within the current affairs series *World in Action* in early 1964. As we have seen, ITV was less bound by particular traditions than the BBC, and at Granada in particular there was a sense of creative and political risk-taking under the leadership of Dennis Forman. However, these developments were not entirely unique: across British television as a whole changes were occurring and opening up opportunities for creative experiment. For example, a number of new film technicians were now entering television, many of whom were adept at using 16mm equipment and eager to experiment with its possibilities. Lightweight, synchronized sound equipment was still relatively fresh at this stage, and new companies, such as Allan King Associates, were formed to hire out such equipment and a camera crew which was able to use it.²⁵ A process of professional change was occurring within television as connections were forged with outside, freelance companies.

World in Action began in 1963 under the production of Tim Hewat. Hewat had previously produced *Searchlight* (Granada, tx 1959–60) and had made a name for himself by making controversial programmes.²⁶ *Searchlight* and *World in Action* both fell foul of the Independent Television Authority for contravening the notion of impartiality, enshrined in the 1954 Television Act.²⁷ Hewat showed himself unafraid to challenge convention, not only in technological and stylistic but also in political matters. Hewat had initially planned for *World in Action* to be shot on 16mm lightweight equipment and had consequently made agreements with the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) in order to work with a smaller crew,²⁸ enabling those working for the programme to operate with increased flexibility and mobility.

In its early days *World in Action* used a combination of silent and synch-sound filmmaking. Dissatisfaction with this equipment led to Hewat pushing for more investment in improvements, which he eventually managed to attain, despite claiming that hostility still existed towards the use of 16mm within television.²⁹ At first the programme used an adapted Auricon camera, which was still heavy and difficult to hand-hold over a long period; it would soon switch to using a 16mm Arriflex, then later to an Eclair NPR. The programme also adopted the use of single 10–1 zoom lenses, portable sun-gun lights for situations when lighting was necessary, and the use of non-physical synchronization between camera and recorder.³⁰ Film was then edited extremely rapidly on a fine-grain positive – usually used for the duplication of negatives – and the actual transmission print was used for editing (which saved money and cut down the delay between finishing and transmitting the material).

²⁵ King was a documentary filmmaker who had made many programmes for the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) network and went on to direct some important 'direct cinema' films in the mid 1960s, such as *Warrendale* (1966) and *A Married Couple* (1968). He established AKA in London in 1961 with Richard Leitterman. See Amanda Bateman, 'Alan King clocks up its first twenty five years', *Film and Television Technician* (December/January, 1986/87), pp. 16–17.

²⁶ For more details, see David Robinson, 'The wild man of Manchester: a profile of Tim Hewat', *Contrast* vol. 3, no. 6 (1961), pp. 118–27. Peter Goddard, John Corner and Kay Richardson, 'The formation of *World in Action*: a case study in the history of current affairs journalism', *Journalism* vol. 2 no. 1 (2001), pp. 73–90.

²⁷ Goddard et al., 'The formation of *World in Action*', pp. 77–8.

²⁸ Noel Chanan, 'Granada Television: the early years', ch. 25, unpublished history of Granada Television until 1965. Held at the Granada Television Archive. Also see letter from Tim Hewat to George Elvin (28 September 1962) Granada Television Archive.

²⁹ Chanan, 'Granada Television', ch. 25. See also Tim Hewat, '1965 and all that' paper presented at Granada Television Avant: Conference (20 January 1964) Granada Television Archive, bf 1016.

³⁰ Hewat, '1965 and all that'.

It was in 1964 that *World in Action* became connected with direct cinema. Not only did it begin to use a lightweight, synchronous sound Arriflex in this year, it also hired both the Maysles brothers and Pennebaker to shoot footage for some of its programmes. One film featuring footage shot by the Maysles, *Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! New York Meets the Beatles* (tx 11 February 1964), particularly captured the imagination of critics and marked the moment when direct cinema methods began to infiltrate British television. *Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!* was not broadcast as a normal *World in Action* programme: it was commissioned for the series, but eventually transmitted as a self-contained document without any commentary.

Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! was fast, direct and raw, covering the Beatles' arrival in the USA, fan hysteria and long shots of the group waiting around in hotel rooms, interspersed with them conducting radio interviews over the telephone. Many technical 'taboos' of documentary filmmaking were incorporated, including shaky, jerky camera movements and occasional out-of-focus shots and glare from available light. In conventional terms such techniques would have been interpreted as 'mistakes', but new creative workers felt such stylistic deviations were in fact instituting new, more 'authentic' televisual codes. There is a great sense of fluidity to the film as action does not have to be stopped in order to allow for light changes or new camera set-ups. This creates more 'immediacy' than the earlier, poetic documentaries of Mitchell, in that we feel we are closer to the event as it happened before the cameras. Spatial congruency between camera and sound operators and the filmed subjects is to some extent broken down when there is no need to stop for focal changes or aperture adjustments. Instead, these modifications become inscribed within the final film and evidentially testify to the lack of distance between filmmakers and filmed subjects. This film contains a strong element of Vaughan's 'we-were-there-ness' in its construction.

The ability of the filmmakers to remain continually in proximity to unfolding events is most prominently displayed in the longest part of the film, in which the Beatles are in a hotel room waiting around for a radio interview to happen. The camera here has privileged access 'behind the scenes' and scrutinizes the Beatles in a way that would have been unfamiliar at the time, but similar to the way in which Leacock et al. gained privileged access behind the scenes in *Primary*. The camera follows band members' activities or expressions, effortlessly roaming around the room without a single cut; the *process* of filmmaking is to an extent revealed here, as the cameraman has occasionally to refocus in order to move with the action.

The film was able to provide a 'privileged' insight into the Beatles' life when not on stage. So, for instance, when the camera is in a car and the band are being driven to a press shoot, we see a number of fans run up to the car window. For the audience at the time there may have been a certain interest in seeing the fans effectively from a band

member's point of view. From a more technical perspective, the film is fascinating for the way in which it dramatizes the relations between the filmmakers and the subjects being filmed. The cameras follow the band members relentlessly and the film can in one sense be seen as a record of the filmmakers' ability to access as many areas as possible with their lightweight equipment. This determined pursuit is acknowledged on various occasions by the Beatles themselves, especially by Paul McCartney. In one scene, McCartney darts back and forth and around in circles as if trying to elude the camera, but each time the camera – which rapidly pans around – keeps him in shot, even if only chunks of his body. McCartney goes into a lift and pulls his coat over his head, as if this is the only way he can escape the camera's gaze; he then makes playful movements with his fingers in front of the camera. Later, when McCartney is in a hotel room and the camera is intently focused on him doing nothing, there is a moment when he seems to register frustration over its continual presence, before shaking his head and then again breaking into a performance for the camera.

Whilst *Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!* matched the accepted techniques of direct cinema probably more than any other British television programme during this period (especially in its avoidance of narration), there is no sense in which the filmmakers bled into the background of the scenes they filmed, as was claimed by many practitioners of the method: the Beatles are continually aware of the camera. Unlike in many direct cinema films, they are often filmed just waiting around doing nothing rather than absorbed in a particular activity, so they are constantly playing up to the camera.

Whilst previously the notion of British 'televerite' had been confined to specialist television journals such as *Contrast*, it was now entering the newspapers. An article in *The Observer* raved about the film and noted that the Maysles had used a forty-five-pound shoulder camera which allowed them to be 'marvellously mobile and not much more obtrusive than a normal photographer'.³¹ Phillip Purser in the *Telegraph* was more reserved, writing that the speed at which the film was edited meant that it lacked the 'shape and direction necessary to elevate reportage to art', unlike some of the more noted American direct cinema films. He did, however, see it as an important stage in British 'televerite' and went on to praise its 'vivid actuality'.³²

Direct cinema had arrived in Britain. The Maysles introduced to *World in Action* their modifications to the Arriflex camera. As Tim Hewat recounts:

The standard film camera at the time, the Arriflex, had an eyepiece, a viewfinder at the back, lens at the front, and sticking up in between them the film magazine. Because the magazine was in his way the cameraman couldn't see to his right without removing his eye from the eyepiece. What the Maysles did was to take the magazine off the

31 Pat Williams, 'TV behind the screen' *The Observer* 16 February 1964, p. 23.

32 Philip Purser, 'Television', *Telegraph*, 16 February 1964, p. 13.

³³ Quoted in Chanani, 'Granada Television', ch. 25.

camera and put it on the back, running the film through a channel from the magazine to the camera and back again. In addition, the magazine on the back of the camera provided a counterweight to the bulk of the camera, and with the weight of the camera evenly distributed the cameraman could walk about with it quite comfortably on his shoulder for long periods.³³

The Maysles shot footage for another two *World in Action* programmes – *Models* (tx 26 May 1964) and *Goldwater* (tx 30 June 1964) – whilst Pennebaker shot footage for *Timmings Ontario* (tx 19 May 1964). However, despite the fact that the Beatles documentary showed that direct cinema could be screened on British television, subsequent instances of 'televerite' again contained significant modifications, the most important of which was a refusal to abandon the role of commentary, bar in exceptional cases.

Many *World in Action* programmes in the mid 1960s – including the programmes mentioned above as well as others such as *Vietnam* (tx 3 November 1964) – feature observational shots in which the mobile camera and recorder capture synchronous image and speech. Yet, at the post-filmic level, these programmes eschewed 'typical' direct cinema methods of editing, which usually shaped material into a seamless chronological flow. Instead, raw footage was shaped into a more rhetorical, punchy structure with a swifter editing pace, combined with commentary, interviews and the inclusion of stills. The use of commentary was always alternated between two offscreen voices in a simple, direct manner, so that spoken information could be digested quickly.

As I have mentioned, *World in Action* was a 'current affairs' programme, rather than a 'documentary'. Current affairs and documentaries were often allied to each other through their nonfictional status and overlap of personnel, as well as their joint residence within talks departments. Yet there was a necessity for a current affairs programme to be journalistic, and it was this institutional necessity that led to *World in Action* diverging from direct cinema films in the way that it addressed its viewers (with the one notable exception being aired as a separate programme).³⁴ Therefore, whilst there seemed to be fewer constraints at this time within Granada than the BBC, there were still a number of factors that intersected with the creative visions of programme-makers and the technology at their disposal: ITA statutes, generic demands and union stipulations are three important factors in considering how direct cinema influences became filtered.

³⁴ Of course, American direct cinema was developed in a journalistic context, but apart from the four *Close-Up* films, they also struggled to find a place on television.

16mm and television drama

Whilst the developments I have discussed at Granada occurred under different institutional pressures than those at the BBC, they

nevertheless had an impact upon how the BBC operated. They not only confirmed that 16mm synchronized sound equipment was perfectly acceptable for use in television transmission, but these developments also inspired some staff in the BBC drama department to employ certain aesthetic devices associated with *World in Action* and direct cinema. In the process there was also a demand by some for a move away from live drama towards drama filmed on 16mm film.

There was, however, more resistance towards the use of 16mm cameras in drama than in current affairs because of the different aesthetic criteria pertaining to these separate departments. For example, the notion of 'immediacy' in drama was not compromised by electronic cameras or studio set-ups: for many, the 'live', studio drama constituted its essence. It followed that there was no particular felt need for 16mm cameras to be used in drama production. The aesthetic of 'liveness' may also have persisted longer in drama because many people working within the unit had been immersed in a theatre background.

Even in 1964 the television director Don Taylor was still arguing that television drama should be live:

The small screen, the small audience, the semi-darkness, all encourage a drama of high emotional and poetic intensity. The discontinuous film performance, even by the cleverest film actor, always suffers by comparison with a TV performance that really clicks.³⁵

The continued adherence to 'liveness' in television drama meant that more money was invested in videotape (which emerged in 1958) than in film. Videotape could produce a marketable product,³⁶ could allow people to analyze a dramatic performance after the event, and could be used to make a few edits in order to reduce 'mistakes'. The fact that videotape did not edit easily and involved the use of heavy equipment was no disadvantage when working 'virtually' live in the studio. As Martin McLoone has argued:

When videotape was introduced in 1958, allowing television drama to be pre-recorded and thus widening the scope available to the director in terms of visual style and editing, the notion of the live performance persisted.³⁷

Videotape, therefore, was largely adapted to the pre-existing notions of 'live' drama, and was more often than not used to replace the more expensive option of telerecording for repeat performances.

There were, however, counter-currents emerging. People such as Troy Kennedy Martin, John McGrath, Tony Garnett and Ken Loach were revolting against the live aesthetic in two main ways: firstly, there was a dedication to countering the 'artificial' nature of studio drama; secondly, a devotion to more cinematic, flexible methods. These attitudes were encapsulated in Martin's well-known 1964 article, 'Nats

35 Don Taylor, 'The Gorboduc stage', *Contrast*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1964), p. 153.

36 One of the reasons why videotape was originally seen as a preferable recording medium to film was that it cut out the costs of processing. Yet drama recorded onto tape had to be subsequently copied onto film for overseas sales, meaning it was actually a more expensive marketing medium. See Tony Gruner, 'Television', *Kinematograph Weekly* 70, June 1963, p. 21.

37 Martin McLoone, 'Boxed in? The aesthetics of film and television', in John Hill and Martin McLoone (eds), *Big Picture, Small Screen: the Relations Between Film and Television* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1996), p. 95.

38 Troy Kennedy Martin 'Nats go home: first statement for a new drama for television', *Encore* (March/April, 1964)

39 For a good indication of the hostility felt towards videotape, see Quentin Lawrence, John Robbins, Tony Garnett and Ken Loach, 'Film versus tape in television drama', *Journal of the Society of Film and Television Arts*, no. 23 (1966)

go home', which railed against the theatrical constraints of television drama (yet was actually published in the theatre journal *Encore*).³⁸ The figures mentioned above campaigned for a greater use of film in drama and expressed antipathy towards videotape's lack of flexibility.³⁹ The influence of documentary and current affairs, and the rise of televerite, played a crucial role in spurring creative dramatists to resist videotape and eventually use more and more film, mostly 16mm.

Arguably, pre-film experiments in television drama by Martin and Loach drew on innovative creative structures that had already been used in documentaries. The daring experiments with video montage used in *Diary of a Young Man* (BBC, tx 1964), along with a succession of stills, echo the introductory shots used by Boorman in *Barry Langford*. Loach's attempts to capture a more 'realistic' environment within a studio setting, meanwhile, involved making the frame busy with incidental people coming in and out of shot, a technique used in dramas such as *A Tap on the Shoulder* (BBC, tx 6 January 1965) and *Three Clear Sundays* (BBC, tx 7 April 1965). Such a technique recalls sequences in *Barry Langford* through a consciously planned construction of events that included 'incidental' background details.

These procedures were attempts to mimic film techniques through (largely) studio-based production. However, figures such as Loach, Martin, McGrath and Garnett were dissatisfied with the restrictions of live television (and saw videotape as perpetuating 'live' production methods). They believed that the use of film was necessary in order to move television drama in a 'progressive' direction. Such appeals were occurring around the same time that 16mm lightweight film was being used increasingly within documentary and current affairs. Yet resistance to 16mm film in drama often hinged on the way in which drama was conceived as a combination of well-spoken words and visual performance, which required a 'good quality' image. The belief by many that 16mm created grainy footage, combined with the structural rigidity in perpetuating tried and tested production methods, proved an imposing barrier.

It was, however, a barrier that was eventually overcome. In 1965 Loach and Garnett made *Up the Junction* (BBC, tx 3 November 1965), a landmark drama that used fifty per cent location footage and made extensive use of the hand-held camera (more than half of the 16mm footage used synchronized sound). Loach has recalled how difficult it was to incorporate extensive filmed material into television drama. He and Garnett had to persuade the BBC to let them film more exterior footage than normal, and then, in the studio shots, they subverted the usual video edit in order to edit on a 16mm back-up print so that location and studio scenes were endowed with a sense of continuity. The BBC was apparently less than happy about the situation (due to the quality of the 16mm back-up print), but agreed in order to salvage the material.⁴⁰

The use of location footage in this drama, including travelling hand-

40 Graham Fuller (ed.), *Loach on Loach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 14

held shots and unsteady camera movements, undoubtedly imbued it with an 'authentic' aura previously unseen in television drama; the relation of such techniques to documentary and current affairs would have enhanced such realistic markers. *Up the Junction* was related to documentary in other ways, too: its use of montage fragments of everyday voices and its continual exploration of external space were features that had already been tried out in documentaries. These documentary techniques were both more 'realistic' and 'cinematic' than much television drama had hitherto been. *Up the Junction* also exploited the possibilities of editing and experimented with spatial and temporal ellipses, allowing it to move beyond the confines of 'liveness', yet investing it with a sense of dynamism and 'immediacy'.⁴¹

With *Up the Junction*, Loach and Garnett had shown what could be done with lightweight equipment, and although the response to the programme was not unanimously positive, critics did see the film as vibrant and innovative.⁴² This, along with institutional factors (such as the emergence of a new channel, BBC2, allowing for more experimentation) gradually paved the way for an increasing amount of drama to be shot on location, on 16mm film. In 1966 the BBC established a film production unit for drama, which used mostly 16mm equipment,⁴³ and from this point onwards the majority of drama productions were shot on 16mm. Whilst these by no means followed the same path that Loach took with *Up the Junction* (for instance, the fragmentary, montage technique did not take hold in any sustained manner), there is no doubt that the aesthetic forms of television drama had been irrevocably altered. Location filmmaking enabled programme-makers concerned with contemporary political issues to get outside of the studio and construct reports on real life.

The greater use of 16mm film brought television drama much closer to documentary in many respects, which is not surprising since the innovations made within the documentary unit provided inspiration for 'progressive' workers within drama. Not only this, but the adventurous spirit in documentary departments had already created a merging between the drama and the documentary by taking the 'drama documentary' into new areas. Thus *Z Cars* (BBC, tx 1962–78) – partly originated by McGrath and Martin and featuring episodes directed by Loach – actually had its roots in the documentary department.⁴⁴ Its eventual production within the drama unit meant that it was not shot live, even though McGrath did experiment with live production in order to create a quicker, more dynamic pace. It was Peter Watkin's *Culloden* (BBC, tx 15 December 1964), also made in the documentary department, that broke new ground in the merging of drama and documentary. Filmed entirely on location with lightweight 16mm cameras, and featuring an amateur cast, this overview of the 1746 battle brought a new sense of authenticity to the dramatic reconstruction, utilizing new technologies and highlighting them in order to draw

⁴¹ For good discussions of *Up the Junction*, see Caughie, *Television Drama*, pp. 114–20; Jacob Leigh, *Ken Loach: Art in the Service of People* (London: Wallflower, 2002), pp. 39–46.

⁴² See BBC WAC T5/681/1 *Up the Junction*, and *Up the Junction* Press Clippings Files, British Film Institute Library, for more details.

⁴³ BBC WAC, T16/368 TV Policy, Drama Drama Series on Film, 1966. For a list of television drama shot on film, see Kenneth Trodd, 'The Trodd Index', in Jayne Pilling and Kingsley Canham (eds), *The Screen on the Tube: Filmed TV Drama* (Norwich: Cinema City, 1983).

⁴⁴ Stuart Lang, 'Banging in some reality: the original *Z Cars*' in Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain*, p. 126.

⁴⁵ Watkins has claimed that he wanted to invite comparisons between the battle of Culloden and events occurring at the time in Vietnam, which were being seen on television news. See notes on the film by Watkins at *Peter Watkins: Filmmaker and Media Critic*. URL: <http://www.peterwatkins.lit.virg.uk> [July 2003]

⁴⁶ Quoted in Fuller, *Loach on Loach*, p. 15

parallels between contemporary and past events.⁴⁵ This was a 'documentary' that smuggled in elements of 'drama', a process that Loach and Garnett would reverse with *Up the Junction*.

It is likely that Loach and Garnett had seen *Culloden* and were inspired by it and other documentary programmes, such as the 'personal' documentaries of Mitchell, as well as *World in Action*. Discussing *Up the Junction*, Loach has said: 'The big investigative documentary programme at the time was *World in Action* ... and we tried to copy its techniques and cut with a rough, raw, edgy quality, which enabled us to deal with issues head on'.⁴⁶ Arguably, then, the innovations occurring in documentary, which included not only the use of new technologies to capture greater 'immediacy' but also experiments with form in a number of different ways, provided a major source of inspiration for the 'golden age' of television drama. It is no coincidence that a number of people in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Charles Stewart, Jack Gold, Mike Hodges and Chris Menges, worked in the areas of both documentary and drama.

As I hope to have shown, the introduction of lightweight, 16mm cameras, in addition to the aesthetic influence of direct cinema techniques (albeit largely in modified form), led to some significant, cross-generic developments within British television. Whilst the employment of 16mm film was not solely confined to documentaries, current affairs and drama, these were the areas of programming which seemed to be most affected by its employment. They were the areas which included a number of figures who saw the use of such technology as aiding more progressive interventions within television, both on a formal level (new modes of framing, editing, and so on) and on the level of representation (for example, the ability to 'show' unseen British locations and communities). This was particularly the case for television drama, where many figures argued against the institutional take-up of videotape.

Videotape began to be used increasingly for drama productions in the early 1960s partly because of cost, but also because of an adherence to the ontological conception of television drama being distinguished by its liveness and intimacy. Such an ontological conception was, however, an attempt to freeze medium-specific identity. Technological change always challenges such rigid ontological conceptions and allows newer workers to attack established methods of working. As Loach remarked of 'live' drama: 'Let's face it, live, theatrical television drama is a con trick. An administrative and economic convenience was erected into an aesthetic'.⁴⁷

Through analyzing the broad effects of 16mm lightweight film in television, then, it is plain to see that it was an important element in the reconstruction of both television documentary and drama (as well as intersections between the two). It was not so in any determinist,

⁴⁷ Lawrence et al., 'Film versus tape in television drama', p. 10

⁴⁸ The concept of the 'seamless web' is taken from Tom Hughes, 'The seamless web: technology, science, et cetera, et cetera', in Elliott (ed.), *Technology and Social Process*.

monocausal sense. Rather, the investigation of its influence has inevitably led to a consideration of many other factors, such as institutional protocols, economic factors and the artistic visions of creative personnel. For practitioners such as Loach and Garnett, the use of new technology was not an end in itself, but enabled them to experiment with new aesthetic modes, which themselves were related to political considerations. Technology, in summary, can be seen to have intersected with aesthetics, ontology, institutions, traditions, politics and economics, all of which provide a 'seamless web' through which the impact and employment of new technologies must, by necessity, be interpreted.⁴⁸

Laughing into an abyss: cinema and Balkanization

KRISS RAVETTO-BIAGIOLI

*Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.*¹

*Our skulls are flowering with laughter/Look at us your fill look at yourself/We mock you monster.*²

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2000), p. 279.

2 Vasko Popa, 'Song of the tower of skulls', in *Collected Poems*, trans. Anne Pennington (London: Anvil Press, 1997), p. 205.

Since its launch in December 1997, the Los Angeles Freedom Film Festival has promoted those films from eastern Europe that 'reveal the impact of Stalinism in the region from the beginning to today', and celebrate 'the artistic expression of filmmakers inspired by themes of democracy'. Given the festival's billing, I have been struck in recent years by the number of spectators who ask directors from Russia, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Slovakia and Yugoslavia why their films are 'so depressing, so nihilistic' and unrelated to the 'celebration of democracy'. Indeed, films set in eastern Europe's 'predemocratic' past often offer poignant criticism of political and social repression under socialism, but do so without also celebrating democracy. Unlike the discourses on globalization, democracy and neoliberalism that emerged in post-1989 Europe – 'the end of history', the erasure of borders and the triumphant images of the 'fall' of the Berlin Wall and the toppling of Soviet icons – these films suggest that it was not democracy but a cultural wasteland of violence, corruption, isolation and disenfranchisement that succeeded socialism in the former eastern bloc countries and the Balkans.

Many of these films represent neither 'freedom' nor 'democracy' as

triumphantly as both western and eastern media have done in the wake of the Cold War, nor do they offer any *affirmative* alternative (be it political, nationalistic, ethnocentric or even narcissistic). As a result, this year they seemed to disappoint a large proportion of the audience which was looking only to be entertained, and entertained by simple narratives. The audience, which consisted of many vocal expatriates of the former eastern bloc countries, seemed to show a preference for Hollywood-style films that provide a diversion from grim political realities and reduce complex issues to the romantic narratives of Good versus Evil (in which Good usually triumphs) that prevail in both mainstream fiction film and news media. These clear-cut representations serve primarily to support western global hegemony by installing western characters in the role of heroes in the West's own romantic narrative.

Because of their political investments, these films exaggerate eastern Europeans' villainy and relegate the emerging political conflicts and economic crises in the Balkans and former Soviet Union to the background against which narratives of espionage (*The Saint* [Phillip Noyce, 1997] and James Bond films), terrorism or war-games (*Peacemaker* [Mimi Leder, 1997] and *Behind Enemy Lines* [John Moore, 2001]) are played out. Many other western European narrative films and documentaries that deal with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Balkans have also presented simplistic moral scenarios by portraying cultural, political and historical complexities in black and white terms. For example *Serbian Epics* (Paul Pawlikoski, 1993) sets out to buttress the prevailing western belief that 'Serbians' (a generic entity that is left unqualified and unquantified) were solely responsible for the breakup of Yugoslavia by manipulating the masses to engage in ethnocentric myth-making,³ while Régis Wargnier's *Est-Ouest* (winner of the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Picture of 1999) depicts the evils of Stalinism through the eyes of a French woman who, after marrying a Russian doctor, has to escape the horrors of the Soviet Union and go back to the free West. Michael Winterbottom's *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997) portrays the siege of Sarajevo as brutal and inhumane, but while it criticizes the role of the western media in Bosnia, it ultimately boils down the complexities of the political crisis to the need to save the children of Sarajevo. Finally, Elie Chouraqui's *Harrison's Flowers* (2001) relies on the personal narrative of a woman who refuses to believe her husband has died in Vukovar, goes to retrieve him, and encounters the stock Serbian rapists as well as the barbaric violence and the chaos. Although these narratives tend to be tragic in form, they do not produce a moral revelation. Instead, by reaffirming western moral positions, they simply legitimize western political actions and stances.

Because even the high-profile films about these crises have had relatively little commercial success, it is not surprising that eastern European films that attempt to represent the complexity of crises facing

3 Susan Woodward argues that documentaries like *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, *Bloody Bosnia* and *Serbian Epics* are 'anti-historical narratives' that seem themselves 'obsessed with identifying these conflicts as historical'. That is, documentaries that seek to situate modern behaviour in an epic are guilty of not only their own version of historical revisionism, but myth-making. 'It depends when you start the story: narratives as camouflage and the political use of scholarship on the Yugoslav wars', presented at the conference *Doing History in the Shadow of the Balkan Wars*, University of Michigan, January 1997.

the region have suffered from a lack of interested distributors and have been confined to the film festival circuit and college classrooms. In addition, they have received mostly negative reviews from both eastern and western Europeans largely because they neither deliver clear-cut moral judgments, indulge in nostalgia for socialism, nor celebrate the joys of capitalism.

A film which has met with such a reception is Emir Kusturica's *Podzemlja: bila jedom jedna zemlja/Underground* (1995). The award of the Palme d'or at Cannes in 1995 to *Underground* aroused the wrath of several critics who accused it of being apologist for the Milošević regime. According to Paris-based Montenegrin journalist Stanko Cerovic, 'Kusturica's reconstruction of history has nothing to do with reality, unless you accept the theories of Serb nationalists' (although Kusturica was born a Bosnian Muslim). Alain Finkielkraut, French philosopher and public defender of Croatian independence, accused Kusturica of betraying his Bosnian heritage by producing 'hackneyed and deceitful Serb propaganda' (even though he later admitted he had not yet seen the film). Slovenian cultural critic Slavoj Žižek, meanwhile, has argued that *Underground* 'unknowingly provides the libidinal economy of the ethnic slaughter in Bosnia: the pseudo-Bataillan trance of excessive expenditure, the continuous mad rhythm of drinking-eating-singing-fornicating'.⁴ *Underground* was also condemned for re-Balkanizing Yugoslavs. For Marianna Yarovskaya, the film represents a 'boyish refusal to bury an old and fragmented Europe', while for Žižek it gives 'the western liberal gaze precisely what it wants to see ... the spectacle of a timeless, incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passion'.⁵

Similarly negative reactions have been elicited by some post-Soviet films. Russian filmmaker Kira Muratova's *Asteniceviz Sindrom/Asthenic Syndrome* (1989) was criticized at the 2000 Freedom Film Festival for being 'too critical' and 'too complex'. Her response was that such criticism (which she claimed to have received not only in Los Angeles but also in Russia) was unjustified because her film was ultimately about joy. *Asthenic Syndrome*, she continued, was about 'the defeat of intellectualism' and 'various different reactions to psychological problems in a country where the human skeleton is not hidden so well'. As such, her film 'entertained' those who celebrated the 'joy of negative analysis'. Muratova presented the criticism offered by her film as a different form of 'entertainment' that challenged the audience's demand for simplicity.

This tension between audience and filmmaker was not limited to Muratova's film but evolved into a broader debate over the interpretation of 'entertainment'. Eastern European filmmakers construed 'entertainment' as the entertaining of ideas that do not simply replicate conventional cultural constructions (aesthetics, narrative tropes and characters), but visualize radical shifts in cultural conditions by featuring accelerated temporalities, nonlinear

4 Cerovic, Stanko, 'Canned lies yellow press heroes', *Bosnia Report*, August 1995; Alain Finkielkraut, *Le Monde*, 2 June 1995; Slavoj Žižek, 'Multiculturalism, or, the cultural logic of multinational capitalism', *New Left Review*, no. 225 (1997). For a more extensive analysis of the critical reception of *Underground*, see Dina Iordanova's *Cinema of Flames* (London: British Film Institute, 2001). Although Iordanova is also critical of Kusturica's 'politics' and his 'arrogance', she points out that many of these critiques are politically motivated.

5 Marianna Yarovskaya, review of *Underground*, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 2 (1997-98); Žižek, 'Multiculturalism, or, the cultural logic of multinational capitalism', p. 38.

- 6 Justin Wyatt, *High Concept Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 69.

- 7 This debate reveals to what extent filmmakers and critical thinkers from the former Soviet block and Yugoslavia have been left in a precarious position. Right now they are praised by both western and eastern intellectuals and even indirectly supported by companies like Philip Morris (sponsor of the Los Angeles Freedom Film Festival) because they can be used for exposing the evils of socialism and neonationalism. However, it is doubtful that this will translate into financial support, since most of their work is not considered sufficiently commercially viable to be distributed in the US market.

relationships, instabilities and uncertainties. Reacting to films that depict instability, aporia and uncertain change, some in the audience called for more easily digestible or familiar filmic images and narratives. Their plea was for readability of political messages, aesthetic styles and character types, but it was mostly a plea for narrative resolution. They expressed their frustration by accusing Muratova and other filmmakers of being nihilistic or intellectually elitist. Ironically, Muratova's work, like that of Russian filmmaker Pjotr Luzik (*Okraina/Outskirts*, 1998) and of Kusturica, reveals that such pleas for simplicity are far more nihilistic and cynical than the joys of critical complexity that they seek to validate. Unlike the blockbuster or the 'high-concept' film (which Justin Wyatt defines as a reactionary style of 'post-generic filmmaking' based on the simplification of narrative and character),⁶ the films of Muratova, Luzik, Kusturica and many others evaluate the difficulty (if not the impossibility) of reconciling the socialist past with present global, Balkan and eastern European erosion of social cohesion.

These films cannot be reduced to one category or style. Muratova's work is an almost encyclopaedic study of the complexity of human responses to personal trauma and to the sociopolitical circumstances leading up to *perestroika*. It marks an abrupt shift from the politics of silence or veiled critique to an open voicing of social and political criticism. Luzik's and Kusturica's films parody popular stereotypes and modes of representation, exposing the violence and absurdity that underlie heroic and romantic traditions (epic, historical, patriotic and personal). This eclectic shuttling between narrative and performative styles ends up challenging the veracity of both eastern and western ideological and historical claims and of mainstream media narratives about the Balkans simply by mimicking them. Despite their many differences, these post-Soviet and post-Tito films find common ground within the debate about 'entertainment value'.⁷

The 2002 Freedom Film Festival featured a round-table discussion on 'Does the world need film festivals?' Participants Erika and Ulrich Gregor (curators of the Berlin Film Festival), Kyrill Razlogov (curator of the Moscow International Film Festival), Christian Gaines (curator of the AFIfest) and Gary McVey (curator of the Freedom Film Festival and executive director of the American Cinema Foundation) all agreed that the world needs film festivals in order to support public critical appreciation of independent, political and art films. Festival sponsors, however, are increasingly concerned about the commercial viability of these events and therefore want to appeal to the mass market. Razlogov pointed out that whereas in the past the Moscow film festival held an important role in the cultural life of the city, attracting over ten thousand people, now it has to show Hollywood blockbusters to attract attention. The panelists also claimed that the current generation of filmgoers was less critically sophisticated and knowledgeable about film, world politics and mass media than the audiences of the 1960s.

and 1970s. These earlier festivals supported dissident films because the audience demanded that films be provocative. Without this audience, film festivals now showcase 'world cinema' instead of providing a forum for dissident or political film.

Though the term 'world cinema' is obviously less political than 'dissident film', the Gregors defined 'world cinema' as 'passionate and political', but added the qualification that 'passion means different things at different times'. They suggested that the selection and exhibition of explicitly political films have been curtailed, and taking their place are often films that focus on personal politics (coming of age, family romance or the struggle for personal expression), the exotic history and images of the non-West, and the hybridization of cultures. In their assessment, the public's taste for politics has moved from the direct challenging of institutional power to cultural politics, that is, issues of identity.

Speaking at UCLA in March 2000, Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda summed up the problem facing dissident filmmakers, artists and critical thinkers when he jokingly commented that 'every filmmaker must have an enemy'. He seemed to anticipate that, with the threat of socialism now gone, his recent film *Pan Tadeusz* (1999), that debuted in Los Angeles at the festival, would receive a rather dismissive response from western critics. For Wajda, locating 'the enemy' also meant instilling a sense of agency in film. He declared that his films gave a voice to, or spoke for, workers during World War II, and for the wartime and postwar oppressed. That is, they spoke in the name of those he saw as the victims of Nazism and, later, of socialism. He made an argument for what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call 'oppositional cinema'.⁸ Because his films were subjected to censorship under the old Soviet system, Wajda coded his dissent in what he described as an 'ironic wink' between himself and the audience, a wink implying a certain solidarity between the two.

Bruce Robbins explains that such politicized allegories draw on a sense of agency that 'legitimizes the public representativeness of criticism as such, its responsiveness to the active voice or will of the people'.⁹ But while this 'inspirational agency' speaks in the name of public representativeness, it also circumscribes the notion of public will within narrow boundaries – idealism, nationalism and ethnocentrism. For those who enjoy critical analysis, this situating, locating and grounding of the collective or oneself in specific political contexts becomes a very problematic process. Involved in such gestures is also the more or less disingenuous manoeuvre of simplifying, generalizing and abridging complex issues and situations. Even dissident acts of positioning have to face Nietzsche's monsters that are reproduced through conventional forms of opposition – oppositions that generate more violence and acts of revenge.

On the other hand, Wajda correctly pointed out that in order to communicate critically we need to engage with certain conventional

8 According to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, narratives of opposition are directly political. For example they condemn colonialism and western mass culture and global capitalism, or in this case Soviet realism and socialist repression of expression, politics and culture. Opposition itself not only reaffirms the dominance of its enemy, but also the dominance of its own master narrative, by setting up a hero to counter that of the western or eastern. See *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), ch. 4–5.

9 Bruce Robbins, 'Comparative cosmopolitanisms' in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds) *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 252. Robbins argues that agency is a general defence of a particular notion of selfhood, yet while we do not need 'easy generalizations' we do need 'difficult ones'. It is through these more difficult, 'less pious' generalizations that we can examine our own professional 'situatedness' as metropolitan or 'cosmopolitan', that is, we can 'ipso facto' judge [ourselves as] 'intolerably contaminated and self-contradictory'. Hence, we have to constantly question the gesture of belonging or situating ourselves with respect to political agency.

forms, including the form of opposition. However, this does not mean that we need to treat these forms conventionally, or that we need to accept their pre-established sociopolitical or cultural groundings. In fact, the very notion of 'ground' (identity, belonging, right to speak from a certain position, right to criticize certain claims or people, and so on) has become the rather complex subject of furious debates among filmmakers from the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. Wars over territorial claims are pernicious not only for the direct consequences of their violence but also because they uproot contemporary identifications (such as socialist history and politics), traditions and communities in favour of ones that are historically revised, if not plainly mythical.

This *terra infirma* does not suggest that people have become deterritorialized, rootless or cosmopolitan. On the contrary, they have become overterritorialized in historical, national, ethnic and religious terms. 'Balkanization' became part of political terminology during the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 as a means of defining the process of fragmentation of imperial, historical and national boundaries as well as of economic, political and legal systems. As a term, however, 'Balkanization' has assumed other charged meanings and ideological functions. As Dušan Bjelić explains: 'Like Orientalism, Balkanism had been organized around a sense of binaries (rational/irrational, centre/periphery, civilization/barbarism) arranged hierarchically so that the first site ('Whiteness' or 'Europe'), is always primary and definitional of the second ('Blackness' or 'Balkans'), and so that the second is always a grammatical, internal effect of the first'.¹⁰

There is nothing new about this identification of the Balkans as a negative image of Europe. Larry Wolff argues that a concept of 'eastern Europe' has circulated from the Enlightenment to the Cold War and has been redeployed to redraw certain mythical lines.¹¹ The reduction of eastern Europe to a dumping ground for what westerners wish to disassociate themselves from (violence, rape, nationalism, ethnocentrism) is often maintained through a drastic simplification of history, nationality, ethnicity and religion. What makes these *re-fabricated* (Balkanized) identities of *ex-Yugoslavs*, *post-Soviets*, or citizens of any *former* state simultaneously complex and simplistic is that the various factions, in an attempt to justify their territorial claims, create competing myths of historical nation-states, ethnic, patriarchal and historical continuities out of a patchwork of dubious historical events, religious beliefs and mythology. I use the word 'patchwork' because all of these rival histories edit themselves and each other out of shared stories and experiences, and reconstitute their former compatriots as mortal enemies through the selective notions of nationalism, ethnocentrism, religion, folklore and history.

There are many examples of these selective histories. The speeches of the former President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević, and his book *Godine raspleta/The Years of Solution* (1989) positioned the Serbian people (a dubious construct to

10 Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (eds), *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 3.

11 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

begin with) as 'tragic victims of history', and situated the ethnic Albanian Kosovars, Croatians and Slovenians as historical threats to Serbians' security. Analogously, popular mythology likens Kosovar and Bosnian Muslims to both the conquering Ottoman Turks – who colonized Serbia in the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries – and to religious traitors to their own (Orthodox) people, since they converted to Islam. Similarly, Germany's interest in recognizing Croatia and Slovenia was read as an anti-Serbian campaign designed to repeat the atrocities of the Nazi-allied Croatian Ustasa government of the 1940s. Then, the former Croatian president Franjo Tudjman's books *Nationalism in Contemporary Europe* (1981) and *Impasses of Historical Reality: a Discussion of the History and Philosophy of Malevolent Power* (1989) have argued that the Holocaust and the extermination of Serbs, Jews and gypsies at Jasenovac (the World War II Ustasa concentration camp) were exaggerated accounts designed to oppress the Croatian people (another dubious category). In addition, at the first convention of the HDZ (Croatian Nationalist Party) on 24 February 1990, Tudjman stated that the Ustasa state was not really a Nazi criminal construct, but rather the expression of the historical aspiration of the Croatian people for independence. In 1989, Slovenian president Milan Kucan (a former Communist party member) maintained that Slovenia (the most 'developed' republic) was culturally, politically and economically part of Mitteleuropa. By the same token, it had to be distinguished (and separated) from what he saw as the more backward states (that is, Balkan, anti-democratic and opposed to free trade) of the former Yugoslavia, especially Serbia and Kosovo. Finally, former Bosnia-Herzegovina president Alija Izetbegovic made the dubious claim that Bosnia had always been a 'free state', recognized by the Ottoman Turks who, as he put it, were a model of 'tolerance' and brought civilization to the region.

In each case, the territorial aspirations of these self-defined ethnic groups are cloaked in the discourse of 'human rights'. That is, each group's alleged leader laid claim to the 'right to self-determination', 'territorial autonomy' and statehood regardless of the will of the public and at the expense of minorities and disputed territories. In Bosnia and Kosovo 'crimes against humanity' were used to justify acts of violence as acts of self-defence (for example, the 1989 relinquishing of Kosovo's autonomy was predicated on the alleged rape and murder of individual Serbians by individual Albanian Kosovars). For journalist Misha Glenny, it is not surprising that Yugoslavia exploded into some of the worst nationalist violence in the Balkans because 'the democratization of the country in the late 1980s did not see the emergence of just two competing national identities ... Suddenly, Serbian nationalism was competing with Slovene, Croat, Albanian, Bosnian/Muslim and Macedonian nationalism, etc'.¹²

Such extraordinarily revisionary and reactionary forms of identity politics make it difficult to 'locate' or 'situate' oneself without

12 Misha Glenny, 'The road to Bosnia and Kosovo: the role of the great powers in the Balkans', *Eastern European Studies Meeting Report at the Woodrow Wilson Center* no. 199-18 Apr. 1 2000, p. 3.

13 There has, referring to the popular demand to resurrect the statue of the notorious Felo Üzerzhinsky in front of the ex KGB buildings from where it had been triumphantly toppled on 22 August 1991

assuming some, if not all, of the political baggage that goes with such a predicament. Furthermore, highly-charged debates over territorial rights make it almost impossible to engage critically at any level in the discourse on the Balkans without seeming to take sides, especially when the various competing identifications seem to adhere to Lenin's dictat: 'If you are not for us, then you are our enemy'. Nonetheless, demands for side-taking foreground the glaring inconsistencies and contradictions in such ethnic generalizations. For instance, where do we place those who still call themselves Yugoslavs, those who call themselves Serbian but oppose Serbian-nationalists or are just anti-Milošević, those who identify themselves as Croat but are critical of Tudjman (and his successor as president, Mesić), Orthodox Albanian Kosovars, Bosnians who want to live in a multi-ethnic state, children of 'mixed marriages', Russian residents who believe in Communism, or those who are nostalgic for the icons of the Soviet regime but not for their political implications?¹³ And what do we call these people when names like Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Soviet, and Yugoslav have been so deeply compromised by bad faith, ethnonationalist politics and practices? And how will we speak to these people now that Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian are considered three separate languages with three distinct understandings of their 'common' past and when the naming of 'Kosovo/a' itself becomes a political statement that stakes a claim to territorial propriety ('Kosovo' being the Serbian name for the region, and 'Kosova' the Albanian)?

Furthermore, how do we designate shared personal histories or common historical experiences, when terms like former-or ex-Yugoslav, or former-or ex-Soviet are now only used to denote historical phantasms, subjects of a history under erasure? It is hard to tell which appellation is more fantastic: the subject of a former state who is stripped of any credible historical or territorial identification, or the 'ethnically cleansed' subject who emulates and embalms an imaginary community? While all subjects conjure up ghosts, the self-identifying ex-Yugoslav or former-Soviet cling to their memory that 'once there was a country', painting pictures of Tito as a liberal or Gorbachev, like Lenin before him, as a failed visionary. This leaves former-citizens, as Dušan Makavejev remarks, to be 'citizens of leftovers, [who] watch our past disappearing behind us, and now we see how our future is disappearing too [that is] the loss of our common future'. Instead, the ethnonationalist who affirms tragic ancestral phantasms so as to justify his or her role as the avenger that completes the task of vindication in the name of generations of the downtrodden has prevailed. Michel de Certeau points out that this exclusive, if not openly hostile, form of historiography

tends to prove that the site of production can encompass the past: it is an odd procedure that posits death, a breakage everywhere

14 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 2–5. De Certeau's project is to question the practice of history as a practice of interpretation which he argues is guaranteed by the silence of the other. It is precisely this silence that allows for the transformation of the space of the other 'into a system of production'.

15 Vesna Pesić, 'The war for ethnic states', in Nebojsa Popov (ed.), *The Road to War in Serbia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), p. 10.

16 Robbins, 'Comparative cosmopolitanisms', p. 250.

17 David Rhode, 'Kosovo seething', *Foreign Affairs*, September 2000, p. 78.

reiterated in discourse, and yet denies loss by appropriating to the present the privilege of recapitulating the past as a form of knowledge. It is a labor of death and a labor against death.¹⁴

In the case of Yugoslavia, it is a labour to create new ethnic states, but, as Vesna Pesić points out:

The creation of new ethnic states which led to armed conflict, restored forgotten national questions ... these questions are critical since the case of Yugoslavia reveals that the process of creating new national states can lead to ethnic polarization which appears only 'solvable' through the use of force.¹⁵

Those individuals who cannot be identified or claimed by one group are left to be temporarily embraced by other ethnic, historical, religious or national groups. Since their identities are fragile, these groups desperately try to cover up the many exchanges, interchanges, assimilations and transmutations they shared and still share with their 'enemies'. Both individuality and shared features have often been sacrificed in the name of simplicity, of what Roland Barthes called the 'triumphal language of stupidity'. Assimilation, boundary-crossing, inter-marriage and cultural relativism do not erase identities, nor do they undermine a sense of belonging. According to Robbins, it is impossible to not belong: 'absolute homelessness is indeed a myth, and so is cosmopolitanism in its strictly negative sense of freedom from national limitations or attachments'.¹⁶ Yet Robbins overlooks the fact that belonging itself requires participating in the name game, and it is not clear that one can enter such a game without a recognizable, politically determined and globally sanctioned denomination.

The problem with eastern Europe is that nationalist movements such as that of former Croatian president Franjo Tudjman or the *Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosove* (UCK or KLA, Kosovo Liberation Army) have often been mistaken as prodemocratic movements simply because they are anti-socialist or anti-Serbian. For example, David Rhode concluded his essay 'Kosovo seething' by commenting that 'young Albanians love to wear jeans, listen to American music, and talk of doing business with the West'.¹⁷ Evidently he assumes that these activities are synonymous with developing democratic values. Of course, there are contingency clauses to becoming 'westernized'. Albanians must submit to the civilizing mission of the West by 'giving up lawless retribution' (that is, murdering members of the Serbian and non-Albanian minorities in Kosovo, as well as settling inter-clan vendettas). They must also 'understand what democracy means' and 'accept western norms'. Rhode's argument seems to imply that desperate people are driven to democracy, and that democracy has become a dictate that thinly veils western interests under ideological pretences. As Larry Wolff puts it, the fact that newly 'democratized' eastern European

states' 'recourse to expert advice and economic assistance from abroad will certainly be construed as the ultimate vindication of our own economic success and the backwardness of eastern Europe'.¹⁸

However problematic they have become, terms such as Yugoslav or Soviet were designed to overcome ethnic differences. Unfortunately, they have not been replaced by similarly non-ethnically coded identifications, but only by neonationalist and ethnocentrist ones – identifications that often use the rhetoric of democracy in order to appeal for western military intervention, financial aid and capital investments. One has only to look at the ethnic makeup of the former Yugoslavian states to realize that what has triumphed is not any form of tolerance, but ethnic cleansing and aggressive capitalism. In the poorer regions like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro, this has taken the form of mafia-run states.

Arguably, the interest in western interventions must lie elsewhere, perhaps in a combination of economic, political and social ventures. Anglo-US politicians have used conflicting if not contradictory justifications for intervening in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan: the 'military viability' and 'credibility of NATO', 'making the world safe for democracy', 'protecting national interests', 'advancing the cause of peace', 'upholding our values', 'circumventing a powder keg in the region', 'bombing them back to the stone age', 'preventing a global refugee crisis', 'the war against terrorism'. These statements attest to the political, rather than the ethical, nature of such interventions. While 'human rights' have served as the rallying point for many politicians to intervene in the affairs of other sovereign states, this championing of human rights has been ambiguous at best; the tactics chosen by organizations like NATO often seem less concerned with human life than military strategy.

This antagonism between ethics and politics exposes problems facing historians, cultural critics and filmmakers who attempt to represent, criticize or understand these events. The constant slippage of the discourse of ethics into politics questions not only the boundaries drawn between right and wrong, self and other, good and evil, but also the political agenda behind such distinctions. The cynicism behind the Manichaean opposition between good and evil or just and unjust wars is exposed by the contradiction between promoting democracy and using force, by the conflation of legitimate ethical critiques of human rights abuses with moral outrage, or the sanctioning of violent crusades against what often appears to be an over-determined enemy. As Robin Blackburn argues: 'those who brandish crusading causes, like Tony Blair, can be the most dangerous militarists of all', since they cause 'massive harm to those on whose behalf [their just war] was undertaken'.¹⁹ Or, as Russian journalist Alexander Safronov puts it, these fervent crusaders 'ignore the human rights of one group in order to ensure rights for another'.²⁰ Similarly, in Zoran Solomun's documentary, *Women in Black* (1995), one Serbian feminist activist

19 Robin Blackburn 'Kosovo: the war of NATO expansion', *New Left Review*, no. 335 (1999), p. 119

20 Alexander V. Safronov 'New trials for Europe and the Euro-Atlantic partnership: a view from Russia', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2000), p. 25

points out that the term 'human rights' has only been applied by the West to the rights of Muslims and Kosovars, and only in respect to 'Serbian' oppression. That is, the rights of Serbians, Montenegrins, Muslims and Kosovars to free speech, freedom of the press and fair elections have been largely overlooked, unless it has served the interest of the West to support internal opposition parties within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The practice of distinguishing good from bad nationalism rests on a simple principle of contradiction such as side-taking, and thus promises its own 'triumph' over a designated monster. But the fact that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia, Slovenia, Russia and the NATO-aligned states appeal to 'public' perception in the form of popular narratives – plugging suprahistorical heroes or victims into a romantic battle with an all too inhuman enemy – demonstrates that politics in the age of global communication is not designed just to control knowledge (the 'free flow of information') but must aesthetically appeal to public sensibility by producing emotions and providing entertainment. Such wars of words and images and triumphs of victims over victimizers are followed by the installation of weak buffer states that are vulnerable both to their neighbours and to various forms of institutional corruption.

Numerous films from eastern Europe visualize the transition from repressive socialist systems to unrestrained capitalism. Some of the best examples of the emergence of capitalist criminal culture are Srdjan Dragojević's *Rane/Wounds* (1998), Luzik's *Okraina* and Goran Paskaljević's *Bure Baruta/Powder Keg* (1998). Unlike Aleksei Balabanov's *Brat* (1997), that spectacularizes violence within a moral framework, or Pavel Lungin's *Oligarch* (2002), that has 'the diminutive, balding Russian business tycoon Boris Berezovsky' who many Russians consider to be 'the personification of evil' turned into a 'dashing genius with personal magnetism' by the casting of Russian sex symbol Vladimir Mashkov, *Rane* and *Bure Baruta* point to the contradiction within such representations.²¹ They illustrate how discourses of legitimacy and righteousness collapse into an economic discourse, and how young eastern European men, disillusioned with the failure of previous generations and accustomed to violence and corruption, are attracted to, and influenced by, mostly western icons of machismo, organized crime and gangsters as symbols of material wealth.

Perhaps because they play into western stereotypes about Russians, position themselves as anti-Communist and borrow their aesthetic style from Hollywood, *Brat* and *Oligarch* have enjoyed a relatively wide distribution in Europe and the USA. *Rane* and *Bure Baruta*, on the other hand, explore the problems facing eastern European youth culture and treat gangster culture and lawlessness as synonymous with the violence of capitalism. In both films sons reject the hard work ethic and political conviction of their fathers. In *Rane*, Pinki's father Stojan – a

21 Sabrina Tavernise, 'Film about tycoon reveals lifestyles of the rich and Russian', *The New York Times*, 27 September 2002, p. A7. Tavernise informs the reader that Mr Berezovsky still controls about \$1.5 billion in Russian assets, including stakes in an oil company and an aluminum conglomerate. The interesting part of this article is that it points to the contradictory readings of a figure like Berezovsky, while for the Russians he acquired what was previously socially owned under the new laws of privatization instituted at the bequest of the IMF.

stern, ethical, retired military man – represents the ideals of socialist unified Yugoslavia. Once the country begins to collapse, Pinki's father demonstrates his patriotism through verbal haranguing and by becoming an avid supporter of Milošević (to the point of replacing Tito's portrait with a one of Milošević). Pinki, unconcerned with politics, joins his friend Svaba in assisting a local gangster who periodically joins militia groups to raid and pillage the houses of alleged 'enemies'. *Bure Baruta* features a similar conflict between a Bosnian refugee (who used to be a professor but is now forced to work as a bus driver) and his son, who rejects his father's ethic of hard work and honesty to become an arms and drug trafficker. Rather than focus on the despondent youth culture in ex-socialist states, *Okraina* depicts organized crime as the transformation of Soviet *apparatchiks* from 'privileged' socialist bureaucrats to a cartel of venture capitalists. The difference is that while in the past the Soviets felt obliged to provide some means of livelihood (bread and land) to the peasants, under the policies of deregulation and privatization they are no longer ideologically bound to such a responsibility.

My point is not to find a place for all these contradictions, but to be able to 'unthink' (a term I borrow from Heidegger)²² the logic of positionality that gives voice to purity and self-righteousness, and whose only display of agency is through violence. My aim is to challenge the rhetoric of power that appropriates for itself the discourse of legitimacy and its symbolic, imagistic embodiments. This requires exposing aporia within this discourse's own value judgments, such as the statement that the break-up of Yugoslavia was caused by ancient ethnic hatreds, that Yugoslavia was a counterfeit state, that the Balkan people are more primitive than western Europeans or Americans, and that 'we' westerners have a moral licence to 'stamp out the disease' and 'eradicate extreme Serb nationalism'.²³ The use of such terms resounds with the very same violence that the West accuses 'rogue states' of employing. Appeals to 'cleanse' the world of 'ethnic cleansers' reopens an abyss – an endless cycle of violence.

Although I will not address Muratova's films here, I write in the spirit of her 'joy of negative analysis' and of what Pier Paolo Pasolini labeled 'unpopular thinking'²⁴ – 'unpopular' because it unthinks conventional expectations and truisms and thus makes readers and spectators feel uncomfortable with themselves and their positionings. I am not suggesting that the films I have chosen to discuss are 'unpopular' in the sense that they have not had some commercial success or critical acclaim. In direct contrast to films that dramatize and moralize the violence that emerged as a consequence of the breakup of the Balkans and the former Soviet Union (for instance Predrag Antonijević's *Savior* [1998] and Bernard-Henri Lévy's and Alain Ferrari's *Bosna!* [1994]), 'unpopular' films try to turn such moral imperatives into a scandal. What links films like Dušan Makavejev's *Gorilla Bathes at Noon* (1993), Luzik's *Okraina*, and Kusturica's

22 Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1968). Heidegger suggests that 'we are still not yet thinking', rather we are 'blinking', that is, 'playing up and setting up a glittering deception which is then agreed upon as true and valid—with the mutual tacit understanding not to question the set-up'. To think, therefore, must be more than to question, it must question all truisms, all self-deception about history that prevent us from hearing the language of thinking. Hence for Heidegger, the 'unthought is the greatest gift that thinking can bestow' (pp. 74–9).

23 Blain Harden, 'What it would take to cleanse Serbia', *New York Times*, 9 May 1999. URL: www.newyorktimes.com

24 Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Cinema impopolare', in *Empirismo Eretico* (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), pp. 269–76.

Underground is that they employ black humour to understand the present situation in the Balkans and Russia.

The use of humour alone makes many of these films simultaneously 'popular' (they are quite entertaining) and 'unpopular' because their humour clashes with moral realism – the western and eastern media's favourite aesthetic mode of interpreting Balkanization. These films do not construct morally imbued (as well as ideologically and ethnically biased) narrative forms that mimic conventional aesthetics and dominant representations of reality, but rather use the genre of the carnivalesque as a means of upsetting discourses of right. They do not falsify images, facts and narratives, but rather present truth as neither pre-existent, total nor fixed. They show that truth participates in what Gilles Deleuze calls 'the powers of the false'.²⁵ As D.N. Rodowick argues, putting truth (as totality and identity) into crisis

is not a question of pluralism, of tolerating equally possible yet incomplete and contradictory perspectives on the true. Nor is it a question of nihilism where truth is impossible and all is illusion or fiction. Nor is truth 'historical' in the sense that each era has its own truth that replaces the one preceding it.²⁶

The treatment of truth one finds in these films functions more along the lines of a Nietzschean ass festival than a Bakhtinian celebration of multiplicity. The logic of the ass festival is more than merely oppositional and counter-hegemonic. It laughs in the face of what Nietzsche calls the tarantulas – spirits of gravity who preach equality but are secretly vengeful. The laughter of the ass is designed to lure cloistered dogmatists 'out of their den of lies' and expose their demands for justice as appeals for 'revenge against all those who are not like us'.²⁷ The excessive carnivalesque theatricality of the ass festival treats societal preoccupations as purely performative. However, in a self-critical move, it also hyperbolizes the role of the ass/artist in such a spectacle. Similarly, these films do present certain groups (defined more along political and economic than ethnic lines) as more directly responsible for the violence in the Balkans and the former Soviet states, and yet they do not vindicate any one position. They do not reproduce what has been fashionable in mass media or politically convenient for western interventionists, that is, a binary division between an ethnically generalized identification of a pure victim and an ethnically defined group of evildoers. These films, instead, ridicule such generalizations independently of whether they come from the East or the West. In the process of debunking monolithic characterizations, they demonstrate how national and ethnic stereotypes have led people to react to absurd falsities, producing a senseless violence that has torn apart friends, families and local communities.

While this combination of the carnivalesque and the Pasolinian 'unpopular' seems to be a contraction in terms (since carnival is popular by definition), these films partake in the popular rituals that

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1985), pp 165–202

²⁶ D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p 85

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: New Modern Library, 1995), pp 99–102

- 28 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 165.

Bakhtin describes as 'celebrating violence', 'mocking the dogma of fanaticism', indulging in 'critical consciousness', 'using laughter to disrupt and delegitimize the rhetoric of authority', and 'overturning traditional hierarchies'. As Bakhtin explains, carnivalesque representations 'exclude all one-sided or dogmatic polar extremes of life or of thought, to be absolutized. [Instead] all one-sided pathos or seriousness is caused to collide'.²⁸ Unlike Bakhtin's definition of the carnivalesque, these films do not reflect what he calls a 'temporary suspension' of time, laws, social hierarchies, morals, and so on – that is, a suspension that promises a return to a rejuvenated order. Instead, these films suspend the closure produced by politically motivated moral judgments. To subvert easy resolutions, they point to an indefinite frenzy of violence that leaves little space for renewal or regeneration. And yet this violence cannot be completely overcome. These films' deployment of popular icons, sexual stereotypes, folk songs and narratives does not preclude in any way the celebration of the 'joy of negative analysis'. By borrowing from folklore and from what Bakhtin termed 'local humour', these films defy the standard academic definition of 'popular' as lowbrow and suitable for mass consumption, that is, as something entertaining but not critical.

These 'unpopular' films create a sense of indefinite destabilization of frames of reference where each citation displaces the previous one. Yet previous citations return to comment on those that have displaced them. This movement is not predicated on a dialectical or synthetic model of transcendence, nor does it constitute a synthetic model of heterogeneous ideas and disciplines. Instead, it unhinges a sense of narrativity oscillating between various geopolitical, historical and cultural icons and thus explodes the possibility of hermeneutic closure. Paul Arthur points out that 'in place of Eisenstein's insistence on montage as a template for dialectical argument, Makavejev fosters contradiction for its own sake, withholding the clarifying end point of synthesis or resolution'.²⁹ I believe Arthur's point applies equally well to the films of Kusturica, Dragojević, Luzik and other 'unpopular' filmmakers.

These films attempt to unthink the common intellectual practice of 'identification' through othering. By doing so, they question traditional, othering-based lines between East and West, civilization and barbarity, advanced and emerging markets, self and other, copy and authentic. They try to move away from simple oppositions towards complex relations, thus avoiding the dialectical process of othering that promotes the very differences (monsters) it sets out to undermine, and does so at the expense of tolerance. As Althusser puts it, dialectical thinking often reduces 'the infinite diversity of a historically given society to a simple internal principle of contradiction'.³⁰ Within this model, the circles of the dialectic revolve around a single centre, whose very foundation, according to Deleuze, can only be grounded in the

- 29 Paul Arthur, 'Escape from freedom: the films of Dušan Makavejev', *Cineaste* (Winter 2001), p. 12.

- 30 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Paris: Maspero, 1970), p. 101. Critiquing, specifically, Hegel's internalization of the dialectic.

Althusser argues that for Hegel there are no true external determinations: 'a circle of circles, consciousness has only one center, which solely determines it, it would need circles with another center than itself, decentered circles for it to be affected at its center by their effectivity'. Instead he writes 'Hegelian contradiction is never more than a reflection of the simplicity of this internal principle of a people, that is not its material reality but its most abstract ideology'.

- 31 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990). Deleuze explains that models need a foundation, and 'what needs a foundation, in fact, is always a pretension or a claim. Myth, with its always circular structure, is indeed the story of a foundation' (p. 255).

myth of a truth that is conceived in and of itself.³¹ The dialectic is a method of conserving a pre-conceived mythos of truth.

This mixture of filmic styles – from cinema verité, to nouvelle vague, newsreel footage, fascist propaganda and Hollywood action, war and gangster films – is reminiscent of the black wave (*crni talas*) eastern European cinema from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, specifically the films of dissident filmmakers such as Aleksander Petrović, Dušan Makavejev, and Lazar Stojanović. Black wave filmmakers explored subjects repudiated by the socialist state, and experimented widely with film styles. They often intercut historical footage from World War II, Tito's rise to power, and postwar Communist pageantry to produce a hybrid form of filmmaking that juxtaposed Grierson-type (talking head) documentary, underground filmmaking and the more monumental visual style of social realism and Hollywood cinema. For example, Petrović's *Skupljači perja/I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (1967) treated the then unpopular subjects of ethnic minorities (gypsies), urban poverty, aggressive machismo, womanizing, wife-beating and inter- and intra-ethnic brutality. Aggressive machismo is also ridiculed through exaggerated folk icons and national stereotypes in Makavejev's *Čovek nije tica/Man Is Not a Bird* and *Nevinost bez zaštite/Innocence Unprotected* (1967) and Stojanović's *Plastični Isus/Plastic Jesus* (1972).

Yet it is the alternation between folk humour and official pomp and circumstance – juxtaposing Soviet-style realism, nouvelle vague techniques with documentary footage, folksy slapstick and magic realism – that drives these films beyond the non-linear narratives, the excessive referentiality and the visual experimentations of eastern European *novi* film. The term 'black wave' has less to do with what these films hold in common than with how they have been received. The term derives its meaning from a combination of terms—French new wave and Prague-school black humour—it also refers to the fact that these films were effectively blacklisted, though often without the open acknowledgement of the censorship system. Stojanović, however, was jailed for making *Plastic Jesus* on account of the film's polemical content – references to ethnic conflict, mass murder, complicity with Nazism and genocide in World War II, comparisons of Tito to Stalin, Hitler, US pop stars, the strong man at the circus, and so on, and the juxtaposition of fascist, socialist, capitalist and Hollywood spectacles. What black wave films have in common is that they use pastiche as a form of social criticism, as a way to blur the lines between self-proclaimed oppositional discourses, aesthetic modes of representation, histories and ideologies.

These filmic composites are also accompanied by heteroglossic soundtracks that mix patriotic (nationalist) and partisan song, with gypsy music, German marches and US pop music. For instance, Goran Bregović's soundtrack for *Underground* cites a substantial amount of music from *Plastic Jesus* (Lili Marleen, Allegro con fuoco from

Dvorak's *Aus der Neuen Welt* and the partisan song *Druze Tito*). Like *Plastic Jesus*, *Underground* mismatches familiar sounds with familiar images, animating violent images with carnivalesque music and vice-versa, and confusing the nationalist pageantry of fascist Europe with postwar Communist and capitalist spectacles. As a result, it makes visible what has been covered up by fifty years of socialism – the history of the Ustaša, Muslim, Slovenian and Serbian collaboration, and US cultural and commercial influences on eastern Europe. *Underground*, however, is far less caustic than *Plastic Jesus*, which juxtaposes images of the Croatian Ustaša, Bosnian Muslim Nazis, Albanian and Serbian fascist puppet states, Hitler, Stalin and Tito. *Plastic Jesus* dredges up the racially motivated genocides of World War II and the Chetnik nationalist-royalist combatants in World War II, as well as other events that Tito's multicultural policy had sternly suppressed. What scandalized the Yugoslav audience of the late 1960s and early 1970s was not the treatment of rape, homosexuality, pornography or the Americanization of popular culture, but the use of historical footage of the Ustaša's and Chetnik's fascist puppet states in Serbia, Bosnia, Slovenia and Albania. Such images, in fact, were unofficially banned. Tito promoted 'affirmative' local and ethnic cultural expressions (such as music, dance, folklore and other arts), but he also upheld a policy of social amnesia to censor or actively repress the memory of ethnic animosities of World War II by having the Yugoslav constitution prohibit 'propagating or practising national inequality and any incitement of nationalism, racial or religious hatred and intolerance'.

Films like *Plastic Jesus*, *Innocence Unprotected* and *Underground* recall what Srdjan Bogosavljević calls the 'unresolved genocide' of World War II:

Yugoslavia was, according to its pre-Second World War borders one of the countries with the highest number of war victims, the greatest amount of war damage and the worst effects of genocide. The question of indifference with respect to the war victims therefore arises – while there may be political motives for this indifference, there can be no justification.³²

Consequently, there was an 'unwillingness to stir up and bring into the forefront the barely pacified intolerance among nations'.³³ While derogatory labels such as 'Chetnik' and 'Ustaša' are still commonly used against Serbs and Croats respectively, there remains little discussion of what these terms mean. Instead they slip into a generic category of evil.

Black wave films exposed complex histories and compromised political actors by showing that members of all ethnic groups participated in fascist collaboration, antifascist, partisan, anti- and pro-Communist, anti- and pro-Royalist (Chetnik) politics during World War II. Films like Dragojević's *Lepa Sela*, *Lepo Gore/Pretty Village*, *Pretty*

32 Srdjan Bogosavljević, 'The unresolved genocide', in Nejbos Popov (ed.), *The Road to War in Serbia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), p. 146.

33 Ibid.

Flame (1995) ridicule the current recycling of Chetnik and Ustaša paraphernalia, postsocialist anti-Communism and postfascist antifascism. Such satires of historical figures – partisans, fascists, socialist leaders – remind the audience that in the Balkans recent history has not been ‘worked through’ as it has in western Europe and particularly in Germany. History has remained an underground memory without a public voice. Even sixty years later, filmic representations of these historical events draw virulent responses from critics, but also stir much popular interest. Many critics of *Underground*, for instance, argue that the film is technically masterful, but reject what they call its ideological implications. Those who accuse Kusturica of being biased find proof of such bias in his use of archival footage from World War II, specifically the footage of Nazi troops entering Maribor and Zagreb (where they were greeted by cheering crowds) and Belgrade (where, having bombed the city shortly before their arrival, the Germans were received less enthusiastically). Critics such as Cerović, Finkelkraut and Žižek saw the historical footage depicting Slovene and Croat Nazi collaboration as ‘indirectly glorifying the brave Serbs’.³⁴

It appears that these critics expect all Serbians – from all historical periods – to be represented as villains since the Serbian government and its army are seen as the aggressors in the recent civil wars in Yugoslavia. This somehow implies that Kusturica’s presentation of his ‘Serbian’ characters as antifascist is aimed at turning them into ‘good guys’, but this is far from the case. Kusturica’s character Marko blows up men, women and children of all ethnic backgrounds – people he has entrapped and virtually enslaved in his basement for thirty years by tricking them to believe that World War II is still raging. Besides manipulating this ‘underground group’ to believe that they are still fighting fascism, he traffics the arms produced by his basement slaves. This hardly amounts to a flattering image of ‘brave Serbs’. What Kusturica’s critics seem to have overlooked is that *Underground* condemns Yugoslav socialist leaders not only for lying to the public (keeping them in the dark, or underground), but also for establishing themselves as a privileged elite that embezzled public funds and profited from illegal trafficking.

In the tradition of black wave cinema, Kusturica foregrounds the aesthetic practices that produce exaggerated pompous forms of political spectacle – the use of dramatic lighting, music and cinematic orchestration to illustrate heroic acts, as well as the insertion of documentary footage to give the cinematic spectacle a ‘reality effect’. At the same time, he transforms historical figures into both emblems of social ideals and ridiculous caricatures. Furthermore, the juxtapositions and superimpositions of these cinematic techniques, images and soundtracks (for example when he uses German music to animate Tito) cast Nazi, Yugoslav, Russian and US political pageantry as variations on a theme rather than ideologically and historically distinct. The carnivalization of official spectacles and discourses becomes a new

34 Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames* (London, British Film Institute, 2001), p. 116

35 Denise Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991), p. 230.

aesthetic form – one that helps unthink filmic and mediated forms of ‘simple entertainment’ that reduce complex relations to basic narratives of good triumphing over evil. While official, ‘above ground’ modes of representation are dumbed down to simple spectacles of power, Kusturica points to what lies beneath this ‘triumph of the stupid’: a network of disparate ‘underground’ forces made up of arms smugglers, blindly patriotic followers of a long-dead Tito, draft-dodgers, nationalists, antinationalists, refugees, foreign investors, mercenaries and UN ‘peace-keepers’.

A comparable aesthetic can be found in the Russian film *Okraina*, in which Luzik incorporates parts of Gavril Popov’s soundtrack for Georgi and Sergei Vasilyev’s *Chapayev* (1934). According to Denise Youngblood, *Chapayev* marked the end of avant-garde cinema and the beginning of heroic Soviet epic filmmaking sanctioned by Stalin.³⁵ Luzik, therefore, cites *Chapayev*’s soundtrack both to pay homage to the Russian avant-garde music it incorporated and to point to the contradictions inherent in that film – a film that utilized avant-garde music while marking the end of avant-garde Soviet film and the beginning of regime-friendly cinema. Luzik’s reference to Popov’s soundtrack branches out in several other directions, some of them specific to Soviet history, some pointing towards the West. It is meant to recall the censoring of the Russian avant garde in the late 1930s, but also the homage paid to the Russian avant garde by western filmmakers and critics in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as Popov’s personal involvement in politics (his participation in the *Democratic Reform Party* in the *glasnost* period).

Although set in post-Soviet, ‘democratized’ Russia, *Okraina*’s heroes resemble those of early Soviet cinema (both revolutionary and epic). The protagonists are a group of collective farmers who fight to keep their cooperative farm from being sold off to an oil magnate. Like the heroes of Soviet realist cinema, Luzik’s farmers are the epitome of manliness and determination. They endure cold winter nights, use all means necessary to hold on to their land, and are eventually successful. However, while the Soviet films of the 1930s – films *Okraina* visually refers to – are set in a political context in which capitalism was the ideological enemy of the state, *Okraina* is set in a period in which capitalism is endorsed by the government. Ironically, the office of the oil magnate is housed in one of Stalin’s seven skyscrapers. Because *Okraina* pokes fun at the kind of epic film sanctioned by Stalin (whose style it mimics as an ironic gesture) while being simultaneously critical of the forms of capitalism that have emerged in contemporary Russia, it received scathing criticism in Russian papers, and commensurately little visibility and distribution.

Yet, the victory of *Okraina*’s 1930s-style revolutionary agrarian farmers over multinational corporate capitalism does not produce any clear moral or political resolution. The closing image of the farmers in a state of bliss ploughing their fields does not reaffirm the goals of the

36 Andrew Horton: 'The Russian soul fights back: Peter Lutsik's *Okraina*' *The Central European Review* vol. 1, no. 1 (1998) URL: <http://www.ce-review.org/99/1/knoeye1-horton2.html>

revolutionary past, but seems only to confuse our expectations. This hyperreferentiality of sound and image blurs the lines between the past and the present, socialist, neonationalist and capitalist aesthetics and politics. More than a simple battle between 'old and new Russia, city and country, capitalism and peasant life', the film confuses the old and the new. The hero of the old Soviet era – 'the new Soviet man' – returns to fight the new/same old oil Tsar. Yet this time the hero is no longer shown to use necessary violence. Instead, he is excessively violent (he even enjoys torturing and killing his adversary), obstinate and oblivious to global politics.³⁶ *Okraina* does not make it clear whether a new system has replaced the old Soviet one, if Russia has been returned to its pre-Soviet state or if the Soviets themselves had proven to be just another continuation of Old Russia; after all, the peasants are still fighting for a piece of land.

While *Okraina* reflects on the predicament of the peasant – the alleged hero and beneficiary of the revolution – in the 'post-Soviet' era, Makavejev's *Gorilla* concentrates on another typical figure, the Soviet army officer left behind in East Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Like *Okraina*, Makavejev's film refers to a variety of films and styles, from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens/The Triumph of the Will* (1934) to Soviet realist cinema of the late 1940s and early 1950s. *Gorilla* opens with a parody of *The Triumph of the Will*. The establishing shot of Riefenstahl's film depicts Hitler descending from the clouds to visit a Nazi rally in Nuremberg, while in *Gorilla* we find Viktor Lasukutin, the Soviet army officer, flying over Berlin. But instead of Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries', we hear Viktor commenting: 'half a century ago a trivial man from the south, an unemployed artist came here, invaded other places where he was not wanted, and soon the whole world was here'. After a short, extreme closeup shot of Viktor eating an apple, the film cuts to the scene from Mikhail Chiaureli's *Padeniye Berline/Fall of Berlin* (1949) in which the Soviets take over the Reichstag and fly their flag over the city to indicate their victory over the Nazis. The juxtaposition of three epochs of political filmmaking (Nazi propaganda, Soviet propaganda, the filming of Berlin after the reunification of Germany) as well as of three different ideological frameworks (fascist, socialist, capitalist) is unsettling.

While *Padeniye Berline* can be seen as the direct ideological opposite to *Triumph of the Will*, the film copies some of *Triumph*'s visual techniques. Not only does it enumerate the different ethnic groups of men who participated in the fall of Berlin as Riefenstahl shows the different regions of Germany that contributed to Hitler's army, it also frames Stalin as a mythical, godlike figure not unlike Riefenstahl's Hitler. Intercut with the clips from *Padeniye Berline* and *Triumph* is a scene in *Gorilla* where a German officer arrests Viktor for vagrancy. Upon his release he is given a one-way ticket to Moscow, which he unsuccessfully attempts to sell on the black market.

Without offering any definitive way of reading this series of juxtapositions, Makavejev forces the audience to situate the reunification of Berlin with respect to these two representations of 'historical moments', and to find a place for 'a soldier whose army deserted him'. Viktor asks 'what is a man without a uniform?'; clearly he is a relic of a fallen superpower, a Siberian-born officer of an occupying army, but how are we to place him? Almost overnight, his uniform, his Soviet flag and all that it stands for have become antiquated. Not only is he a man without a uniform, but also a man without either a sense of purpose or a clear political/cultural/ethnic location. Makavejev draws analogies between Viktor and the statue of Lenin that is slated for removal from East Berlin. Like Lenin, Viktor is destined to return to Russia, yet Makavejev questions why Viktor and the statue must return when they are also Berliners. Both are now men without a country, since they belong not to Russia, but to the Soviet Union.

What attracts me to these parodic, carnivalesque films is that although they do *present* violence, they do not reproduce its vicious circle. That is, they do not suggest that violent acts should be treated with retributive violence, or that those deemed 'inhuman' should be treated inhumanely. These films provide a way of *unthinking* any romanticization of violence, from national myths of victimization that call for retribution, to heroic (humanitarian) duties of protecting the planet from would-be tyrants and 'barbaric peoples' by literally cleansing it of them. Nietzsche writes: 'One does not kill with anger, but with laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity'. 'Killing gravity' does not mean making light of ethical questions, revising history or trivializing acts of violence like ethnic cleansing, mass rape or killing. Rather, it is an attempt to disarm those discourses and images that legitimate a violent sense of truth by exposing the absurdity of such modes of representation. Laughter confronts all of those who fashion historical, national and religious rhetoric and imagery on their own political objectives.

Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: the Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932–1937*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, 278 pp.

Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, ed. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow. London: Verso, 2002, 280 pp.

CHRIS BERRY

Laikwan Pang's *Building a New China in Cinema* and the long-awaited *Cinema and Desire* are two very welcome additions to the burgeoning literature in English on Chinese cinema; they are also very different. Pang's book is a historical monograph, while Dai's is an anthology of translated essays, mostly on contemporary issues. Pang is based in Hong Kong and writes in a careful and nuanced way; she surveys all the existing literature in Chinese and English on her topic, giving generous credit where it is due, and offering her own insights, corrections and arguments as and when she sees fit. Beneath her modest tone lies originality that significantly redraws our picture of this important film movement. In contrast, Dai is based in Beijing and comes across as a big-picture intellectual and a big hitter. Wasting little time on the work of others, she strikes out boldly with flashing insight and brilliance, writing with authority and Marxist feminist passion on cinematic and cultural developments in mainland China. Each book is a lively read that has much to recommend it, and will hold a central position in scholarship on Chinese cinema for many years to come.

Pang's *Building a New China in Cinema* is the first book in English to introduce readers to the Chinese leftwing film movement of the 1930s. This movement has been consecrated in the People's Republic as an important precursor of the revolutionary cinema that followed, and is highly regarded in other Chinese communities. Key films like *Street Angel* and *Crossroads* (both 1937) made their appearance outside

- 1 Hu Jibin *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003)

China at retrospectives in the early 1980s. They immediately won attention for their sophisticated cinematic literacy. For example, *Street Angel* includes not only references to Borzage, German expressionist lighting and the Three Stooges, but also an opening sequence that recalls Eisenstein's montage of lion statues. Furthermore, the film appropriates these references for its own ends: the lions symbolizing Shanghai's semi-colonial status, for instance. Mixing these elements with Chinese popular cultural forms and political commitment produces engaging and entertaining results. Over the decades, other travelling exhibitions have revealed the depth and breadth of this remarkable cinema movement, making Pang's book long overdue. Its comprehensive and concise survey of the movement and the existing literature on it, Pang's own convincing and careful arguments, and the many beautiful stills ensure it will be the standard work on the period for many years to come, and an excellent complement to Hu Jibin's general history of pre-1949 Chinese cinema.¹

Pang follows the revision of formerly orthodox Communist historiography that has been developing apace in Chinese cinema circles over the last two decades. Prior to the 1980s, debates in the People's Republic centred on whether or not the leftwing film movement could be claimed as revolutionary heritage. Advocates such as the authors of the standard mainland history of Chinese cinema, Cheng Jihua and his colleagues, legitimated the movement by claiming a close connection between it and the Chinese Communist Party. This interpretation held sway until the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Chairman Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, had herself been a starlet in the Shanghai cinema of the 1930s, going by the alluring sobriquet of Lan Ping, or 'Blue Apple'. The experience had left her with a few axes to grind, and she took the opportunity offered by the Cultural Revolution to attack the leftist filmmakers as being tainted by bourgeois ideology. Their reputation was restored after Mao's death. Outside the People's Republic, anti-Communist critics with their own axes to grind accepted that the leftist movement had produced the most outstanding cinema of the period, but wanted to claim it for a tradition of social criticism without any necessary commitment to Communism.

In her opening chapters, Pang walks carefully through this minefield of vested interests, mapping it for her readers and simultaneously developing her own lucid and credible position. As she demonstrates, many of the leftist filmmakers and the critics who supported them were indeed fully signed-up members of the Chinese Communist Party and committed to its cause, but they were required to operate in a capitalist industry and this involved working with the expectations of both audiences and producers. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and bombing of Shanghai in 1932 created a market for patriotic and critical films, opening the door for leftist scriptwriters and directors, but it remained a market. As Pang rightly says of the initial bridgehead which leftists made into Mingxing Studio: 'The contract between

Mingxing and the three Party members was based on nothing but profits; they could continue making films as long as their films were making money. . . . Thus this film movement belonged not only to the intelligentsia but also to a much broader base of the urban mass' (p. 43).

On this foundation, Pang examines various aspects of the negotiation between filmmakers, producers and public in Shanghai, and how it worked to build a new national collective subject through the cinema. She divides her analysis into two sections, one focused on gender and the other on reception. On gender, she devotes a chapter to the backgrounds of the filmmakers – all male – and their location in the Chinese cultural movements of the times. She argues that they responded to a sense of impotence in the face of China's crisis with a passionate sentimental identification with the 'intellectual-revolutionary' protagonists of so many of their films. In her following chapter, she intervenes in the debates around the tension between love – often viewed by orthodox Communists as 'bourgeois individualism' – and commitment to the revolution, arguing convincingly that this was a period of high romance compared to the decades to come. Finally in this section, she tackles the interesting fact that although the filmmakers themselves were male, many of their films were about women, enabling them to project their impotence onto the opposite sex and make films where the suffering woman stood in for the suffering nation.

By giving the remainder of the book over to issues of reception, Pang takes an important step away from the purely textual approaches that still dominate much writing on Chinese cinema. Her first chapter in this section locates the films against their audiences' horizon of expectation, formed by Hollywood, rising educational standards and urban consumerism. She proceeds to locate the films between Shanghai, as the city that formed them, and the nation, which they aspired to speak for and to. Amongst other things, she notes the films' ambivalence about the city itself and their utopian vision of the countryside, and also analyzes the impact of sound, which led to Shanghai films adopting the national language in their pursuit of an all-China market. Finally, in what may be her most controversial intervention, she argues against seeing these films as realist. Orthodox Marxist criticism in the People's Republic only values realism, and has attempted to claim these films as realist, but Pang demonstrates their indebtedness to conventions of melodrama, shaped by radical politics and underwritten by a heavy emphasis on song. With Pang's monograph firmly in place as the authoritative text on the leftist film movement, it is to be hoped that other authors will take the revision of the historiography of this period of Chinese filmmaking a step further, widening their remit to include the numerous non-leftist films that were also popular at the time.

The interest in social context and gender that subtends Pang's book

also underwrites *Cinema and Desire*. The essays collected here trace the intellectual development of Dai Jinhua, leading Chinese intellectual and professor at Beijing University, over more than a decade. During this time she has moved from text-centred film studies to a broader interest in cultural studies, which, as she explains in an extensive interview that closes the collection, was necessitated by her growing belief that an art-derived approach could not account for the course of Chinese cinema. As editors Jing Wang and Tani Barlow elaborate, throughout this transition she has retained a commitment to both feminism and the Marxism of the self-styled 'New Left' intellectuals in China, who critique the 'marketization' that has overtaken society in the last decade. Quite appropriately, the editors characterize her work as 'wonderfully lacking in optimism' (p. 3), and indeed few films, filmmakers or cultural developments emerge unscathed from beneath her withering gaze. I have no problem with this. Indeed, the heritage of compulsory optimism in the People's Republic itself and the slide to the unthinking embrace of all things 'popular' in much of western cultural studies makes these essays refreshingly sharp. Dai's ability to work boldly through films in complex ways that create links and reveal patterns is sometimes breathtaking, and makes the reader see the films in a completely new light.

The essays in *Cinema and Desire* range from analyses of both the Fifth and Sixth Generations of Chinese cinema to commentaries on the emergence of a culture of shopping malls in urban China and on popular literary fashions. Because some of the later essays have appeared previously in English and this review is to appear in a journal focused on film, I will focus more on the cinema essays. However, certain key metaphors unite the essays and run throughout the book. These include the idea of 'walking from one trap into another', used to describe the hapless fate of Chinese cultural producers who have jumped out of the frying pan of state-led work into the fire of the marketplace; the 'floating bridge' (or pontoon) that ideologically 'sutures' historical and social ruptures such as the 'Tiananmen Incident', which haunts the book but is necessarily rarely spoken of explicitly; and the 'hall of mirrors' where globalization leaves cultural producers and Chinese audiences caught between their own expectations and those of international audiences. For example, her remarkable essay on the early work of Fifth-Generation filmmakers such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, which opens the book, speaks of it not only as the 'art of the sons', engaged in an Oedipal relation to its predecessors, but also as a 'severed bridge' that fails to complete the Oedipal process. It attempted – and, in Dai's analysis, ultimately failed – both to critique Chinese tradition and to construct a bridge taking modern Chinese viewers back across the rupture of recent history towards that tradition. In the second essay, which examines the fate of these filmmakers in the 1990s, she depicts them caught in the new trap

or 'city of mirrors', where they have to satisfy the orientalist expectations of European and US audiences to survive.

If Dai is not happy with the Fifth Generation, neither does she pull her punches about the Sixth Generation. She characterizes feature filmmakers such as Zhang Yuan and documentary makers such as Wu Wenguang as composing 'a scene in the fog'. Dai believes the trap these filmmakers fell into was a dependence on the international film festival circuit. But in their case, instead of orientalism they encountered a determination to lionize any Chinese filmmaking European and US critics could characterize as 'dissident' or 'underground', no matter how far-fetched. She concludes that 'in the Chinese city of mirrors, the efforts at cultural dialogue (especially between the East and the West), even the successful ones, constantly proved the "incommunicability of cultures"' (p. 91).

If these essays give short shrift to western film culture, the following chapters on the representation of women in Chinese cinema and the activities of women filmmakers are equally scathing about the situation in China. Dai is dismayed by the consequences of women's liberation delivered by the Party rather than won by women themselves, including a definition and filmic representation of equality that called upon women to prove they could do anything men could do and to shoulder a double burden of work both at home and in the factories or fields. Furthermore, without an autonomous feminist movement, it has been impossible to prevent the return of institutionalized sexism and discrimination as the state steps back and allows the market to grow, resulting in the disappearance of women filmmakers and the continued absence of a 'women's cinema'.

However, there are dangers in Dai's drive to discover large cultural patterns that the more painstaking but less immediately impressive style of Pang's work avoids. Producing these patterns is sometimes dependent on omitting that which inconveniently does not fit. For example, there is no question that Dai's characterization of early Fifth-Generation cinema as 'the art of the son's generation' enables powerful insights. But, surprisingly for a feminist critic, it depends on writing out of history several of the 'daughters' that Ni Zhen points out in his history were also part of the Fifth Generation.² This process is continued when, having decided that China has only ever produced one example of 'women's cinema' – Huang Shuqin's *Woman*Demon*Human* – the work of these same Fifth-Generation women directors such as Hu Mei, Peng Xiaolian and Liu Miaomiao is mentioned only in passing, even though much of it was conceived by the directors themselves as 'women's cinema.'

In these circumstances, *Cinema and Desire* needs to be recommended with both enthusiasm and caution. It is an invigorating and challenging read, but where Pang's *Building a New China in Cinema* is authoritative, *Cinema and Desire* is best approached by a reader with the knowledge and confidence to think back. For example,

2 Ni Zhen, *Memoirs from the Beijing Film Academy: the Origins of the Fifth Generation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

on more than one occasion Dai makes confident statements to the effect that 'strictly speaking, postcolonial theory is a leftist resistance theory generated by Third World intellectuals in the US academy' (p. 253). Again, ironically for a critic who has her guns trained on US domination of globalization, it seems Dai's field of vision excludes the subaltern studies scholars of South Asia, whom many would credit with inventing postcolonial theory, and the crucial contributions of scholars based in the UK, such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy.

The impression that *Cinema and Desire* is best suited to the knowledgeable professional is reinforced by its presentation, something for which Dai herself is clearly not responsible. Whereas Pang's book includes a bibliography with full Chinese character entries, Dai's book misses Chinese characters completely, making it difficult to trace sources. The original publication details and dates for the Chinese versions of the essays are not given. Worst of all, the translators do not use the English-language export titles for the films she writes about, but instead translate the titles literally. Unless you are already in the know, you may never work out that the film you saw as *The Drive to Win* appears here as *Seagull*, or *Army Nurse* as *The Chamber of Maidens* (p. 142). The whole point of publishing a book of translations is to make the work accessible to those who cannot read Chinese, but this can only create further confusion.

However, unlike Dai herself, it is imperative not to end this review on a negative note. Despite my reservations, this long-awaited collection remains compulsory reading. We need to hear not only the voices of western critics and transplanted Chinese scholars on Chinese film, but also the insights of those writing from inside China itself. *Cinema and Desire* gives English-language readers access to the insights of one of the most brilliant Chinese film and popular culture scholars of her generation, and Dai's bracing arguments will challenge many of our complacent assumptions about the achievements of Chinese cinema and push us to face up to its contradictions and vicissitudes in ways that only the work of an insider can.

Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, trans. Christopher King. London: The Athlone Press, 1998, 403 pp.

HOWARD FINN

The editorial for the Spring/Summer 1973 issue of *Screen*, dedicated to the work of Christian Metz, announces a forthcoming translation of Jean Mitry's *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*¹ (*The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*). Seeing this 'mammoth' work as 'concluding' the 'pre-history of film theory', the editorial worries that its belated influence on Anglo-American film culture is 'a dismal prospect' and, with Metz as its weapon, *Screen* intends to 'counter such a development'² – hence the strategic placing of a translation of Metz's lengthy critical review of Mitry's *Aesthetics* at the beginning of the issue, before the translations from Metz's own *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*. The editorial now makes for poignant reading in several respects, not least because *Screen*'s pre-emptive strike was so successful that the anticipated translation never appeared and, Dudley Andrew's expositions aside,³ Mitry's work remained marginal to Anglo-US film culture. In fact it has taken three decades for Mitry's magnum opus to at last be translated and to assume its rightful place in film studies and in university libraries.

As Brian Lewis points out in his foreword, Jean Mitry (1907–88) had a career in which he was ideally placed to attempt a theoretical overview of cinema's first half century. He started out as a member of the French avant garde in the 1920s and knew almost everybody: Gance, Renoir, Eisenstein. He was one of the earliest teachers of film at a French University and, along with Henri Langois, founded the Cinémathèque Française. As well as being a critic and teacher, Mitry maintained links with film production, working as editor and director.

This abridged version of *Aesthetics* begins with a rather cursory discussion of auteur theory and the loose relation of cinema to literary

1 Published in French in two volumes, 1963 and 1965

2 Editorial, *Screen*, vol. 14, nos 1–2 (1973), p. 2

3 Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 185–211

discourse and language. The bulk of the text is then divided into four main sections. The first deals with concepts of the image, the second and third deal with concepts of rhythm – especially the rhythm of montage, incorporating discussion not only of editing and cinematic durations, but of relations between image and sound and of relations between elements within the image such as angle, depth, colour, and so on. In Mitry's schema, cinema is basically reconstructed 'reality' mediated by the 'aesthetic' spatial and temporal juxtaposition of its component parts, eliciting a 'psychology' of spectatorship involving emotional identifications, physiological processes and the perceptual apparatus. A final, shorter section of the book is taken up with a technologically-oriented history of cinema, a restatement of Mitry's reservations as to the linguistic model for a codification of cinematic forms, and a rousing call for a future cinema which creates its own aesthetic independent of the other arts. Given the broad sweep of these sections it is unsurprising that the same topics and debates recur time and again under the all-encompassing signs, as it were, of image and montage.

There is no doubting the authority of Mitry's position and work, yet the fears of *Screen* as to his influence were probably misplaced. A school of Mitry theorists was as unlikely in London as it had been in Paris because *Aesthetics* does not deliver an easily transmissible theory of its own, but instead offers a working through of critical positions towards other theories. Even here, despite or perhaps because of its extraordinary range and comprehensiveness, Mitry's text does not necessarily work as a summing-up of film theory. Discussions of its two key interlocutors, Eisenstein and Bazin, are dispersed throughout the 379 pages, as are discussions of key concepts such as frame and subjective image or key techniques such as tracking shot and depth of field. The book appears to be structured in a rigorous and logical manner, but in practice any movement from the demystifying and clarifying of core general concepts in the abstract towards their particular and historical manifestation is decidedly blurred, since for the most part Mitry keeps conceptual, technical and historical registers running back and forth continuously. In addition, he is in constant dialogue not only with fellow film theorists and directors, but with more general aesthetic and philosophical perspectives – Merleau Ponty and phenomenology understandably, given the date, providing the governing philosophical paradigm. For example, the first major part of the book, 'The Film Image', contains a section entitled 'Structures of the Image', which begins with a subsection 'Shots and Angles' – an outline of ten different categories of shot, from long-shot through wide angle to closeup (p. 60). This leads to a discussion of camera movement and depth of field in Griffith, Welles and others (Mitry seeing camera movement as inherently a sequence of shots), and a discussion of the editing of shots and 'punctuation' such as dissolves, wipes and fadeouts. This in turn leads to a lengthy discussion of early

silent film and the importance of the frame in determining the structure of the image and in mediating the realism of representation. Mitry then starts to sum up his analysis of 'the shot' (p. 78), only to veer off into a digression on spectatorship and identification involving a phenomenological exposition of the spectator's body and perceptual apparatus responding to the relationship of lightness, darkness and angles of viewing perspective from a seat in the auditorium *vis-à-vis* the screen, along with Mitry's personal recollections of feeling cold while watching *Nanook of the North* in September 1922 (p. 86).

From its initial appearance in French, readers have commented on this sometimes exasperating character of the text, whose primary mode might well be described as digression. In the editor's introduction Benoît Patar notes that Mitry was aware of the criticism and agreed to substantial cuts and some restructuring of material (p. xiii). The original two volumes were thus condensed to the single volume used for the present translation. Yet as *Aesthetics* unfolds, the reader begins to realize that the book is grounded in a set of fundamental questions, and that these provide an underlying coherence: what is the relationship between cinema and the other arts; what is the relationship between cinema and reality; what is the relationship between film images and everyday perceptual images; what is the relationship between film and language? In his digressions, polemics and anecdotes, Mitry is actually approaching these questions from a variety of viewpoints. Thus digressions on the frame as mediating the realism of offscreen space may appear marginal to the summarizing of categories of shot, but are part of an ongoing engagement with the 'psychology' of realism; and such digressions do themselves provide threads of continuity. For example, much later in the book Mitry gives an account of experiments he conducted with students using filmed tilted horizontals projected onto tilted frames on screen, the students 'seeing' straight horizontals, even to the extent of unknowingly tilting their heads in relation to the frame to restore the 'correct' anticipated angles – these experiments, for Mitry, exemplified the power of the frame to order the perceptual reality of the spectator (pp. 219–24).

Throughout *Aesthetics* Mitry draws specific comparisons and contrasts between cinema and other arts, but the broad view is clear: renouncing his youthful enthusiasm for impressionist and expressionist schools of silent cinema, Mitry sees the early obsession with distinguishing film from theatre as having led to a completely mistaken analogy of film with music and to consequent notions of 'pure' cinema. For Mitry, the transition from silents to talkies marked the end of *general* parallels between film and music, painting, theatre or poetry. Instead cinema increasingly interacts with the novel – it is primarily about narrative and character, and all techniques, devices and forms are but means to create a credible cinematic world, a *presented* reality or diegesis, overseen by the camera eye in the manner of an omniscient narrator, into which the spectator can enter and with which the

spectator can identify (pp. 333–6). However, what is absolutely unique about cinema, to Mitry, is that unlike all other arts it uses reality itself to signify the narrative reality: a bunch of flowers in the fictional narrative of a film is represented by a 'real' bunch of flowers, not 'pure' representation as in painting or an arbitrary signifier like the word 'flowers' as in a novel (pp. 46–8). The film image is thus both a window frame through which reality is presented/perceived and a pictorial frame within which the image is represented/composed. This relates to the overarching theme of the book: the status of what would now be called the 'virtual reality' of the cinematic image.

Mitry sees the film image as inherently dualistic, as sustaining a dynamic relation between the real and the represented real, both at the level of (objects in) the image in a film and at the level of the film's diegesis. The movement is from fragments of the real to the (re) constructed reality of the cinematic image. When this movement is properly integrated within the image, diegesis and narrative, then (and only then) do the images have the power to move from denotation to connotation, to attain poetic registers, to signify transcendental meanings. Much of *Aesthetics* therefore consists of close readings of scenes from a canonical set of films (Griffith, Eisenstein, Renoir, Welles, Wyler), in which Mitry distinguishes between those images that maintain the duality of the cinematic real and those images that conflate, confuse or subvert that duality by undermining representation, privileging 'direct' reality, or appealing directly to a metaphysical essence. Despite his obvious lifelong love of Soviet film, Mitry frequently castigates Pudovkin, Vertov and especially Eisenstein for montage which juxtaposes diegetic images with extradiegetic images, signifying ideas and concepts external to the represented reality of the film, not to mention the imposition of rhythms of montage external to the 'realist' flow of the narrative. Moreover, because the creation of emotional identification is, for Mitry, essential to upholding the 'realism' of a film, attempts to introduce Brechtian alienation effects go against the grain of the narrative cinematic experience, and far from liberating spectators (from an overdetermined narrative) instead trap them in the metafictional idealism of the director. Clearly Mitry saw in 1963 where Godard and the New Wave might be heading, and equally clearly one can see why for *Screen* in 1973 Mitry was a suspect figure.

Alongside his running battle with excessive montage, however, Mitry mounts a polemic against the anti-montage forces of Bazin and his followers at *Cahiers du cinéma*. By mistaking the long-take of neorealism or the depth-of-field of Welles for reality itself, Bazin is guilty of blurring the distinction between reality and cinematic representation, thereby undermining the duality of the film image. Eisenstein and Bazin thus form two sides of the same coin: undermining the dualistic representational reality of cinema in the name of an essentialist reality – itself, Mitry is quick to point out, actually a

vehicle for metaphysical concepts (Marxist dialectics in Eisenstein, the spiritual in Bazin).

In attacking the extremes of formalism and neorealism, Mitry arrives at an aesthetic of realism equivocal yet even more proscriptive than the positions he criticizes, and seemingly unable to account for a postwar art cinema in which both formalist and neorealist tendencies are filtered through a self-reflexive turn. For today's reader, Mitry's aesthetic is likely to appear conservative and his psychology outmoded. But the central issue concerning the status of reality in the cinematic image remains important and, in any case, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema* is less interesting in its conclusions and value judgements than in the theoretical speculation and wealth of historical and technical information contained in its digressions.

Robert Giddings and Keith Selby, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio*. London: Palgrave, 2001, 241 pp.
 Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Serial*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, 232 pp.

IRIS KLEINECKE

- 1 In particular his article 'Representing the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993). Higson's approach draws on Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987) and Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country: the National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985), and their study of history and heritage within the context of industrial and political developments in Britain. Their studies draw links between the decline of the British economy, Thatcherism, and the increase of the cultural significance of preserving the past, turning it into a kind of 'industry'.
- 2 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 207.
- 3 Existing case studies on the classic serial as a television product include the following: Paul Kerr 'Classic serials: to be continued', *Screen*, vol. 23, no. 1.

Until recently, academic work on the classic serial was mostly expressed through two different strands of criticism: adaptation theory and the debate about heritage film. Research about the television adaptation was thus centred either on analysis of the process of adaptation from novel to screen, or – especially through Andrew Higson's work on British cinema and the heritage film in the early 1990s¹ – on analysis of the ideological and economic implications of costume drama in Britain and abroad. The classic novel adaptation as a specific part of British television programming has not usually received critical attention, almost giving the impression that this type of drama is not worth considering in its own right. The reasons for this 'blind spot' are at least partly to be found in the nature of the classic serial itself. As John Caughie states in his article on adaptation, the classic serial's nature as a television product which draws on a literary canon but which simultaneously situates itself within a mass medium, has caused problems for critics in both fields.² Moreover, in being an adaptation of a literary text rather than written for television, the classic serial, although regarded as television drama, is often not acknowledged in the various studies of 'original' television drama and the television play.³

The appearance of two books on the classic serial on British television, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio* in 2001 and *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Serial* in 2002, may finally change perception of this type of television drama. Both address the classic television serial as part of its medium and see it as a genre

11982), pp. 6–19. John Caughie, 'Small pleasures: adaptation and the past in British film and television', in *Television Drama Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Robin Nelson's study of *Middlemarch*, *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* and *X-Files* in *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997).

in a specific context. Both studies aim to contextualize the genre and show how medium-related factors determine the choice and look of adaptations. Both draw on literature where appropriate but aim to see the classic serial as a specific product of its own background. Thus, although the books differ in aim and approach and do not reference each other, their related subject matter as well as the scarcity of material on the topic make a comparison seem appropriate.

Robert Giddings and Keith Selby's *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio* attempts to create a chronological and historical outline of the genre from its beginnings in British radio to the present day. The study offers a useful overview, which takes into account some of the medium-specific background of the classic serial and addresses issues of public service broadcasting and the multi-channel environment as influential for the development of this type of television drama. It shows how the classic serial is shaped by the medium, the cultural implications of the classic novel and its status, and socioeconomic factors which govern its making and consumption.

The book is arranged in eight chapters, which take the reader through the decades from the 1920s to the present day. Starting with a chapter on the origins of the classic serial in radio and early television, its definitions and history, Giddings and Selby look at generic, cultural and ideological factors influencing the genre. The chapter sets up the background of the study by introducing the classic serial, its radio broadcast origins, the early beginnings of the genre on television as well as the impact of colour television and institutional competition through the launch of ITV in 1954. Chapters two to four then follow the development of the genre up to the 1990s, addressing themes and popular novel choices as well as the influence of commercial television in the 1970s and the beginnings of the ratings war in the 1980s. Chapters five and six engage more closely with what Giddings and Selby term the '*Pride and Prejudice* factor'. Using the example of this popular and influential 1995 serial and the resulting popular craze for Jane Austen, which encompassed far more than just film and television adaptations, they explore the shift of adaptations to an emphasis on female experience. Looking at the serial's success and impact, they also address sociocultural and economic implications and their effects on the genre and on television overall. Chapter seven returns to the chronology, summing up the development of the classic serial during the latter part of the 1990s as informed by the *Pride and Prejudice* factor, but at the same time returning to a broader variety of adaptations. The concluding chapter addresses the classic serial's impact on British culture, arguing that, despite channel competition, through economics, merchandising and information technology the BBC now possesses a monopoly, not only creating what we perceive as the prototype of the classic serial but in some ways seeming to dictate what 'history' is. This, so Giddings and Selby suggest, through the marketing of classic serials as well as accompanying study-aids,

- 4 Her definition of genre in this context is general, flexible and based on a definition of genre as a group of programmes exhibiting a strong group style and a set of recognizable conventions with which contemporary viewers are familiar. She thus consents that the terms 'sub-set' or 'cycle' might be more defensible in this context. Her aim is not a discussion of television genres but the creation of a basis for a discussion of this type of adaptation, which takes into account recurring traits and their development.

publications and website information, may result in a passing of the 'baton of literary opinion leadership' from academic into media hands (p. 201). If the choice of novel is governed by economic and market factors, the finished product shapes the notion of British literature and British history for consumers at home and abroad. The classic serial is thus shown as possessing the power to create a literary canon even while both the choice of drama and the shift in how literary texts are adapted indicate a move away from the faithful translation with which the genre first began.

Sarah Cardwell's work on the classic serial in *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* considers the adaptation as part of a British broadcasting tradition. Through a medium-specific analysis, which foregrounds the defining traits of the classic serial and its development, she attempts to distinguish the television adaptation from the film adaptation and to reach an understanding of the specificity of this televisual form. Cardwell aims to introduce an approach to the classic novel adaptation that is based on the aesthetics of the classic serial and its specific emotional, cognitive and cultural significance.⁴ Cardwell's book is divided into two parts and moves from the definition of the adaptation, through an engagement with existing criticism and theory and a explanation of her understanding of genre as well as televisuality, to an articulation of her own approach. Part two consists of the application of this approach through textual analysis of four classic novel adaptations.

The first part of the book thus offers a very useful account of existing criticism and theory and further provides the background necessary to formulate Cardwell's approach. The first of four chapters in part one offers a definition of adaptation, which Cardwell defines not necessarily as the faithful translation of a literary text into a different medium but as the gradual development of a meta-text in which each adaptation draws on earlier versions, thus allowing for generic development. Chapter two addresses adaptation criticism and chapter three provides an excellent review of existing types of adaptation theory, which Cardwell identifies as medium-specific, comparative and pluralist. She appropriates medium-specificity, which allows her to concentrate on textual analysis and aesthetic questions regarding the classic novel adaptation. This helps her to develop an approach that acknowledges the specificity of the televisual as distinguished from film and to identify the classic-novel adaptation as an evolving genre. In the last chapter of part one, the author attempts to contextualize her approach within the televisual context as well as within genre studies. Suggesting that intertextuality is a strong feature of the classic serial, Cardwell aims to use a range of standard generic motifs of 'content, style and mood' (p. 98) which refer to previous and contemporary adaptations, to establish generic identity and to emphasize their place within a wider televisual context. Based on observations about television's presentness, flow and intertextuality, Cardwell identifies

the televisual as simultaneously textual, intertextual and extratextual, constituting a 'televisual world' interacting with our daily lives – it constitutes culture. By focusing on the classic serial's existence within television, she wants to draw attention to its development and pay heed to its unique place within televisual culture as part of a literary tradition and part of the televisual medium as fast-paced, popular and consumerist.

In the second part of her book, Cardwell examines the development of a genre through close analysis of four recent programmes: *Brideshead Revisited* (ITV, 1981), *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC, 1995), *Moll Flanders* (ITV, 1996), and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (BBC, 1996). She aims to show how the use and reflexive reuse of tropes has led to the evolution of a genre of classic novel adaptations that has come a long way from the traditional 'faithful' adaptation. Her analysis of *Brideshead Revisited* shows how the adaptation's faithfulness to its literary source results in the creation of a 'type' and a nostalgic mood, which is then developed into a generic archetype in *Pride and Prejudice*. Increasing self-reflexivity then results in the embracing of its televisual identity and intertextuality in *Moll Flanders*, and finally there is a reflexive return to the genre through a reworking of generic tropes in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Cardwell thus shows generic identity as the result of interaction between the discourses of literature and television.

These two studies, then, address different, but complementary, aspects of the classic serial as part of the British broadcasting tradition. Giddings and Selby focus on a combination of a comparative approach of novel and adaptation and a discussion of the genre and its development through the impact of the medium, public service broadcasting traditions and economics on its form. They recognize and address some of the influences of the classic serial on the creation of 'classics', and throw light on some of the medium-specific production issues which underlie the genre. However, the broadness of their approach does not permit close textual analysis of particular types of representation or period preferences within this genre of television drama. Cardwell, through her medium-specific approach, is concerned with aesthetic questions regarding the classic novel adaptation and the way in which the genre has developed from the faithful adaptation and a near-negation of its medium to an increasing self-reflexivity and engagement with its own televisuality. However, she does not engage in a detailed discussion of the classic serial and its development in a historical sense or as part of the public service broadcasting ethos.

Both approaches are useful. Giddings and Selby's study paints a broader canvas and provides a good basis for further research into the field, while Cardwell's focus on generic traits of content, style and mood addresses the conventions of the genre, thus shifting the focus from a comparison of novel and adaptation to the intertextuality and cross-fertilization of the genre within its medium.

Each of these books merits a place in the television studies library, not least because of their address of a genre still widely disregarded. With their in-depth discussion of the classic serial in its institutional context, both books provide much needed engagement with this popular television genre and will provide a framework for further study.